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**Tiivistelmä**

Ihmisen tilakokemus on kaikkien aistien, muistojen ja mielikuvituksen yhdistelmä. Näistä syntyy atmosfääri. Tilakokemuksessa intuitio toimii nopemmin kuin analyysi, joka tarkoittaa, että tunnemme tilan tai paikan ennen kuin tiedämme sen käyttötarkoitusta tai tarinaa. Tämä kokemus sisältää käyttökelpoista tietoa, jota kutsutaan runolliseksi tiedoksi. Kun tilasuunnitteluprojekti aloitetaan, rakennuspaikka ympäristöineen on täynnä kyseistä runollista tietoa. Sekä muotoilija, että suunnitelman tuleva käyttäjä kokevat paikan atmosfäärin omilla tavoillaan. Perinteisessä suunnitteluprosessissa käyttäjä ilmaisee tarpeensa muotoilijalle, jonka intuitio laitetaan töihin. Mutta entä käyttäjän intuitio? Myös käyttäjän atmosfäärikokemus sisältää runollista tietoa, jota voisi analysoida ja hyödyntää suunnitteluprosessissa.

Haasteena tässä on se, että intuitiivinen kokemus, tai niin sanottu *runollinen kuva,* on henkilökohtainen ja pakenee järkeilyä. Se on periaatteeltaan analyysin vastakohta. Kuitenkin ihmiset kykenevät kokemaan asioita yhdessä ja usein samansuuntaisesti. Atmosfäärin kokemus on myös siis transsubjektiivinen, joka tarkoittaa, että se voidaan jakaa tiettyyn pisteeseen asti. Tämä osoittaa, että on olemassa mahdollisuus ilmaista ja analysoida kyseinen kokemus ja näin tuottaa siitä käyttökelpoista runollista tietoa.

Tämä lopputyö pyrkii tutkimaan intuitiivisen atmosfäärikokemuksen ilmaisemisen ja jakamisen mahdollisuuksia käyttäjältä muotoilijalle. Tämä tapahtuu keräämällä runollista tietoa. Käyttäjän intuitiivinen kokemus muutetaan sanoiksi ja analysoidaan. Prosessi toimii työkaluna muotoilijalle, joka voi käyttää kerättyä tietoa suunnittelutyössään. Kysessä on alitajuisen havainnointiprosessin muuntaminen tietoiseksi kommunikaatioksi käyttäen empaattisen muotoilun metodeja.

Lopputyön produktio-osuus on kolmen viikon mittainen testiprojekti Pohjois-Carolinassa, Yhdysvalloissa. Testiprojetki on käyttäjän ja testin sijaintipaikan välinen järjestetty kohtaaminen, jossa muotoilija toimii kotoutettuna muotoiluluotaimena. Tosin sanoen, minä muotoilijana vietän kolme viikkoa paikan päällä käyttäjien kanssa, ja me työskentelemme yhdessä tilasuunnittelmaa tehden. Muotoiluprosessin perustana toimii osallistujien materiaalinen ja emotionaalinen tilakokemus yhdistettynä testin sijaintipaikan erityisiin, ihmisten välisiin (kulttuurisiin, sosiaalisiin, alueellisiin ja kansallisiin) atmosfääreihin. Testiprojektin lähtökohta on siis paikan atmosfääri, eli suurempi kokonaisuus johon yhdistyy ja josta riippuvaisia ovat kaikki pienemmat yksityiskohdat.

Kolmen viikon testi dokumentoidaan muoloiluluotaimin sekä practice-led tutkimusmentelmiä käyttäen. Itse testiprojekti ja siitä kerätty aineisto analysoidaan ja sitä verrataan perinteisempään muotoiluprosessiin. Analyysin lopputuloksen toivotaan antavan tietoa empaattisen tilasuunnittelun luonteesta ja siihen liittyvistä haasteista.

**Avainsanat** atmosfääri, intuitio, runollinen kuva, tiedonkeruu, empaattinen muotoilu, practise-led tutkimus, luova prosessi, paikkakohtainen arkkitehtuuri, autoetnografia

# Master's Thesis

in

# Spatial Design

2016

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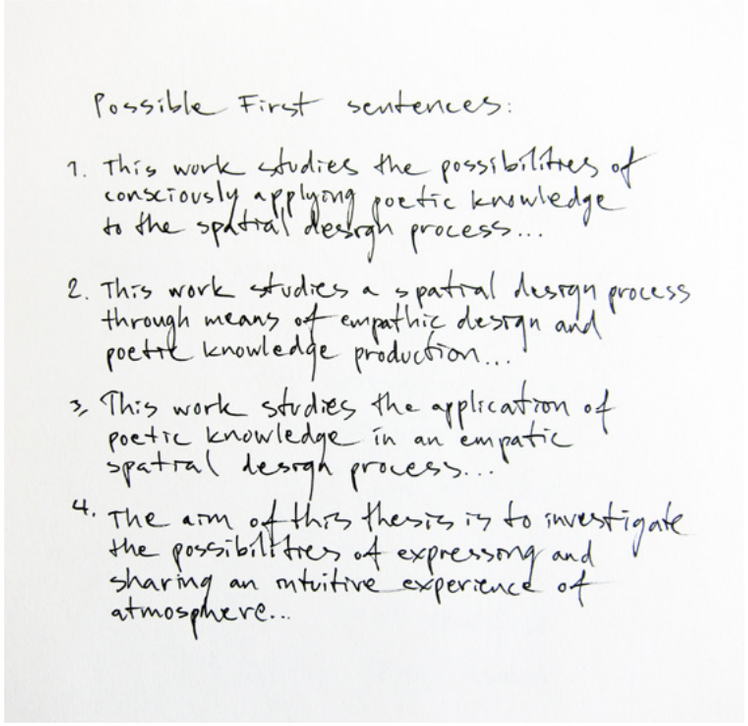
School of Arts, Design and Architecture
Department of Design


# Three Weeks to a Year






**Abstract**

The human experience of space is a combination of all senses, memory and imagination. This creates the sense of atmosphere. In that experience intuition works faster than analysis, which means that we feel spaces and places before knowing their function or their story. That experience is valid knowledge called poetic knowledge. When a spatial design project is started, the building site and its surroundings already have an atmosphere full of that poetic knowledge. The designer and the eventual user of the design experience that atmosphere both in their own ways. In a traditional design process the user voices his or her needs to the designer whose intuition is put to use. But what about the user's intuition? The user's experience of atmosphere also contains poetic knowledge, which could be analysed and used in the design process.

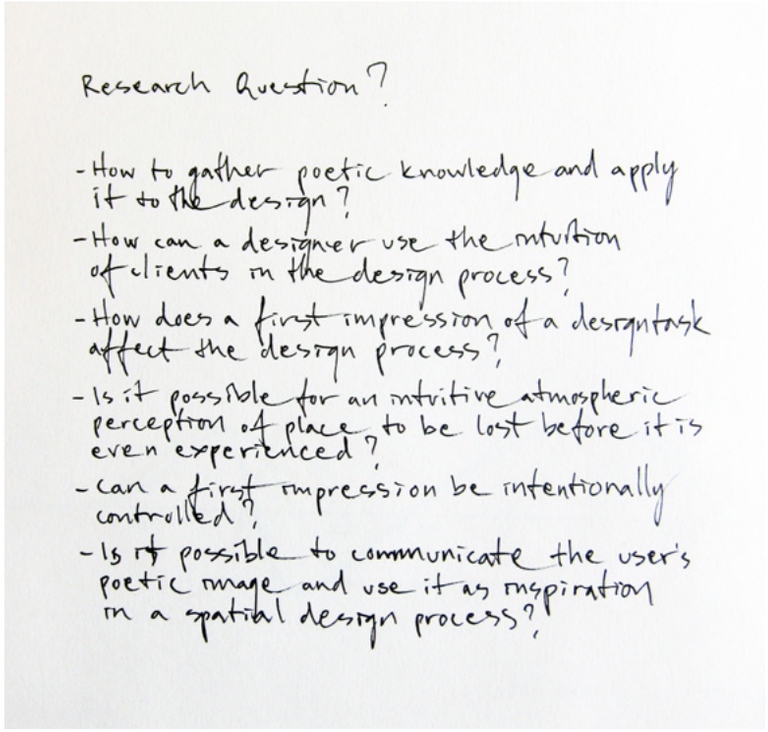
The challenge is that an intuitive experience, or a so-called *poetic image* is personal and flees reasoning. It is by definition the opposite of analysis. However, humans can experience things together and often in a similar way. The experience of atmosphere is therefore transsubjective, which means that it can be shared to some extent. This indicates a possibility of expressing and sharing the experience and thus producing applicable poetic knowledge from it.

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the possibilities of expressing and sharing an intuitive experience of atmosphere from the user to the designer. This is done by gathering poetic knowledge. A user's intuitive experience is turned into verbal form and analysed. The process works as a tool for the designer, who can use the gathered knowledge in creating the design. This means turning an unconscious process of perception to a conscious process of communication using techniques of empathic design.

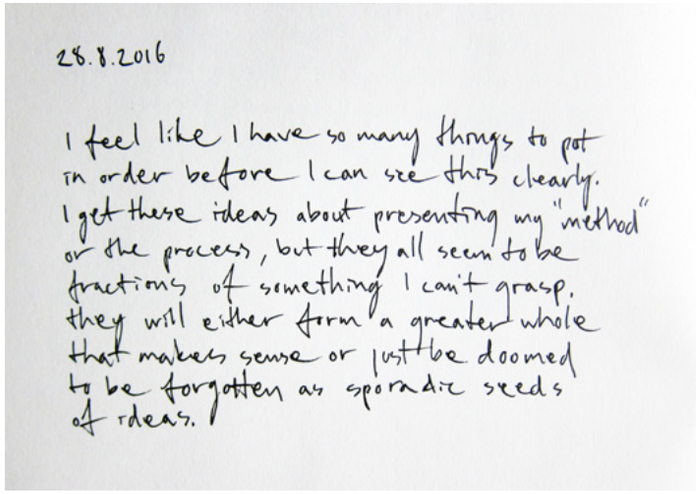
The production component, which is the creative part of this thesis is a three week-long test project in North Carolina, USA. It is a staged encounter with a user and the test project site, where the designer functions as a domesticated design probe. In other words, I as the designer spend three weeks on location with clients and we work together designing a space. The materialistic and emotional guidance of the participants' perception of space combined with existing unique interpersonal atmospheres of the place (cultural, social, regional and national) serve as the basis for the design process.

Documentation of the three week-long test is done as a combination of design probes and practice-led research. The test project itself and the material gathered during it is analysed to give insight into the benefits and problems of designing spaces in an empathic way. This analysis is combined to the designer's personal journey through the research process.

Key words:
spatial design, atmosphere, intuition, poetic image, knowledge production, empathic desing, practise-led research, creative process, site-specific architecture, autoethnography




Is it possible to communicate a user's experience of atmosphere and use it as inspiration in a spatial design process?



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## Glossary

*Atmosphere*
-A surrounding influence or environment. In this thesis it is the basis of the design process.

*Client*
-The person or institution, which commissions the spatial design. In this case also the user of the design.

*Designer*
-The term *designer* can also refer to an architect and vice versa, due to the over lap between spatial design and architecture.

*Design probe*
-A technique used to inspire ideas in a design process. It serves as a means of gathering knowledge about people's lives, values and thoughts.

*Design process*
-The creative process of a design project.

*Design project*
-The complete project of planning, creating and realizing a design.

*Empathic design*
-A user-centered approach to design, which takes into account especially the feelings of the user.

*Intuition*
-The unconcious part of human thinking. The opposite of reasoning.

*Object*
-In this thesis the term *object* refers to the surrounding environment, which is experienced by the user (*subject*).

*Perception*
-Awareness of the elements of environment through sensory and existential observations.

*Place*
-The term *place* means more than a geographical location. It encompasses the environment, history and personal meanings of the site where something is designed.

*Poetic image*
-A philosophical term for an intuitive product of the poetic imagination, how the unconcious human psyche sees, for instance, music. This term can be connected to any poetic experience, it does not necessarily refer to poetry, or to a visual image.

*Poetic knowledge*
-Knowledge gathered from experiencing the world instead of analysing it. It is the opposite of scientific knowledge. Poetic knowledge is based on intuition.

*Practice-led research*
-Academic research, where art or design practice is incorporated to the research process as a method of producing knowledge, for instance, an artist investigating a certain phenomenon by making art and documenting the process.

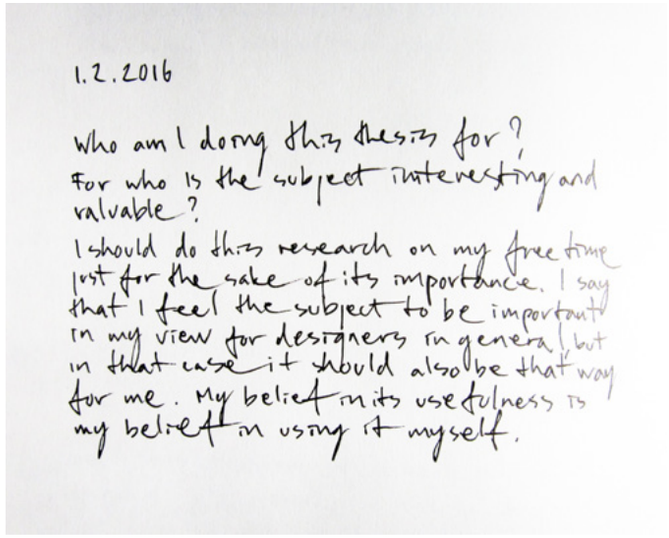
*Subject*
-In this thesis the user of a space is referred to as the subject, who experiences his or her surrounding environment (*object*).

*Transsubjective*
-Between subjective and objective. Objective in a universal sense, but subjective as an individual experience. For instance, atmosphere is experienced in a transsubjective way: It is personal to one, but can be experienced in similar ways by many.

*User*
-The eventual user of the design. In this case also the client.

# Background

-Why is this important?
-Art and science
-Creating atmospheres
-The old ways
-Intuition and spaces
-The poetic image
-Personal atmopshere experiment





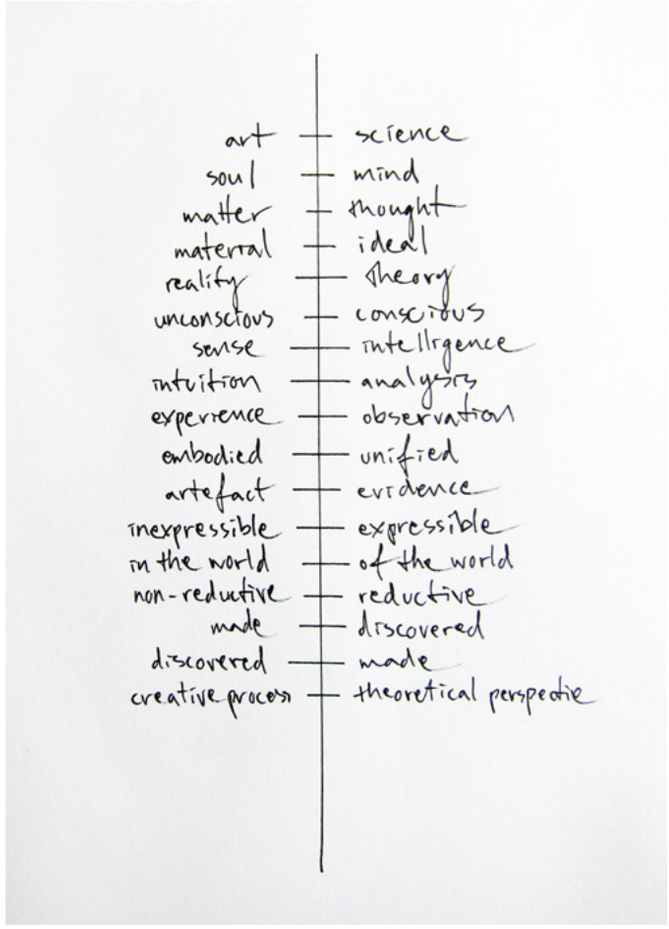

**Why is this important?**

The human experience of space and place is a combination of all embodied and existential senses. It is a fusion of countless factors. Alongside the perception of the traditional five senses it includes sensations of orientation, gravity, balance, stability, motion, duration, continuity, scale and illumination. It also includes a temporal dimension fusing it with the past through memory, and with the future through imagination. In that experience intuition leads the way before analysis, which means that we experience spaces and places before knowing their function or their story, we grasp an overall ambience or mood intuitively and instantly. Rather than through focused and conscious observation, we perceive and judge the character of atmospheres in a diffuse, peripheral and unconscious way. (Pallasmaa 2014, 230-231.)

That sense of atmosphere, that feeling of place is valid knowledge. It offers a different perspective on the world besides the dominant analytical, instrumental and technological. This new perspective might be called a *poetic* perspective (Berlemont, Goossens, Hendrickx & Janssens 2014, 2-3). A design process is a combination of art and science, which means that it is poetic and analytical at the same time. It exploits both the scientific knowledge, gathered from observing the world, and the poetic knowledge gained from experiencing the world (Berlemont et al. 2014, 1).

When a space is to be designed, the building site and the surroundings already have an atmosphere full of *poetic knowledge*. The designer and the eventual user of the design experience that atmosphere both in their own ways - they both have access to the poetic side of the experience, which in this kind of division would be the artistic side, where as the more technical part of the project, including practical problem solving and structural issues, is mainly within the realm of the designer or the engineer.

In a traditional spatial design process the user voices his or her practical and functional needs in relation to circumstances to the designer, who's intuition is put to use. But what about the user's intuition? The user's experience of atmosphere also contains knowledge, which could be analysed and used in the design process. For instance, when a plot of land is bought and a house is to be built on it, the user, a person who will some day live in that house, feels and perceives the atmosphere of that place exactly as much and as deeply as the designer of the house to be. It is easier to express and to work on practical problems than on challenges of the soul, but if the user's intuitive experience is not expressed and examined, a substantial portion of the possible poetic knowledge is lost, and the creative process is left at the mercy of the designer's intuition. How then could the designer even begin to understand the multitude of meanings, which that particular place has for the user? How could the design reflect the emotional landscape and history of the place seen through the eyes of the user? The dreams and the fears it evokes unconciously, the things that art is meant to convey?






## Art and Science

The division between art and science is fairly apparent in the way both of these areas of creativity are seen traditionally. Science is understood as being responsible for theory, evidence and facts, where as art falls in the category of the indefinable, intuitive and even sentimental. Embodied, poetic knowledge has a lower ranking in credibility compared to scientific knowledge due to the fact that it is difficult to quantify. Even though architecture operates somewhere between art and science, architectural research has its roots in the modern scientific research tradition and is often approached through scientific disciplines like technology, sociology or history. (Berlemont et al. 2014, 1-2.) This is peculiar since, as mentioned, the experience of an architectural atmosphere leans strongly towards the intuitive, like the experience of art. Architect Juhani Pallasmaa equates the grasping of the essence of weather to that of atmosphere, as neither of them require an intellectual explanation in order to be percieved. Weather affects us even when we don't understand anything of meteorology, just like atmosphere affects us in situations, which we cannot necessarily analyse or describe meaningfully. The material, geometric, or dimensional properties of a space can be researched and measured scientifically, but not in time for them to add anything to the initial experience, the first impression. (Pallasmaa 2014, 232.)

In the practice of architecture, due to the advances in the field of sciences and material research, the role of the architect has changed from the pre-industrial master builder, who was in charge of all aspects of the project, to one who directs functional and aesthetic issues, while engineers are responsible for structures and other technical issues. (Popovic 2012, 8-9.) As the world keeps changing, and new ways of research are incorporated into the design process, for it to better meet new demands, the research conducted within the creative field changes.

The role of the designer is under transformation also as we can see, for instance, in the restructuring and renaming of departments in Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture. Old divisions and titles do not seem to apply anymore. Strategic research in creative industries is transdisciplinary by nature and often has a practical outcome in the form of a product, with its commercial benefits and restrictions (Collins 2010, 14). The role of art and design practices in academic research has also been under debate during recent decades. The product of a creative process, be its form or medium anything between a painting and a dance performance, is now seen as a central part of the research. Practice-led research is internationally applied and argued over in the broad field of art – including dance, theatre, music, architecture, fine arts and design. It can have its motivation in practice or research, but it meets the same requirements of rigour and knowledge production as all scientific research. It seeks interesting ways to use art practice in research, through its unique position in the academe. (Mäkelä &Routarinne 2006, 12-15.)

Rethinking the historical relation between art practice and art theory demands that the relationship is no longer thought of in oppositional terms (Davey 2006, 20). In comparison, bridging the gap between practice and theory in the creative field is similar to treating poetic knowledge with the same respect as scientific knowledge is treated, and not seeing these two as opposites. Both are needed and affect each other - scientific discoveries often require intuititive thinking, as well as artists can benefit from technology and so on. It is in the liminal zones, the in between, where an unconcious way of being *in* the world meets a conscious elaboration *of* the world, where things interact and reverberate (Berlemont et al. 2014, 1-3). Unconscious perception has unexpected synthesizing capacity in areas of no apparent intelligence or value. Unfocused creative scanning grasps complex entities and processes, without an understanding of the elements involved. Emotional reactions are often the most comprehensive judgements that we can make, even when we don't know why. Those emotions do not need rationalization to be real. (Pallasmaa 2014, 236.) Somewhere between the real and the ideal a seed of a design may be found.

In the three-week test project of this thesis the process of perception is turned into a process of communication. An atmosphere is percieved and communicated onwards. In fact, turning a subjective experience into verbal form is already analysis in its own way, which requires conscious effort and the realisation of the fact that the process takes place in an uncharted area. Designing like this means a shift from the science based, reductive process to a non-reductive one (Berlemont et al. 2014, 3). In other words, instead of moving from elementary building blocks to larger entities, the direction is the opposite: details are subordinate to the whole image, in this case the atmosphere (Pallasmaa 2014, 242). The user cannot experience a spatial design in a vacuum deprived of senses and temporality, and the designer should take this into account in the beginning of the design project, by embracing the shared ambience and not by only stating the atmospheric impact of the finished design afterwards.

The creative process of the three-week test project was planned to follow the chronological order of an atmospheric experience. The experience of the larger entity, the atmosphere, was the basis and the first step of the process. It was followed by an analysis of the experience, which aimed at a design.

Experience - Analysis - Design.



## Creating Atmospheres

Full definition of *atmosphere* according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary:

1. the gaseous envelope of a celestial body (as a planet) *b* : the whole mass of air surrounding the earth
2. the air of a locality
3. a surrounding influence or environment <*an atmosphere of hostility*>
4. a unit of pressure equal to the pressure of the air at sea level or approximately 14.7 pounds per square inch (101,325 pascals)
5. the overall aesthetic effect of a work of art *b* : an intriguing or singular tone, effect, or appeal <*an inn with atmosphere*>

Synonyms and related words of *atmosphere* according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary:

1. a special quality or impression associated with something <*the fireplace and cozy armchairs give the bookstore the atmosphere of a comfortable home*> Synonyms: air, ambience (*or* ambiance), aroma, aura, climate, flavor, halo, karma, mood, nimbus, note, odor, patina, smell, temper, vibration(s) Related Words: aureole (*or* aureola), mystique, romance; genius loci; feel, feeling, sensation, sense, spirit; attribute, character, characteristic, image, mark, notion, peculiarity, picture, property, trait; color, illusion, overtone, semblance, suggestion, tone
2. the circumstances, conditions, or objects by which one is surrounded <*liked the quiet and scholarly atmosphere of his prep school*> Synonyms: ambient, environment, climate, clime, context, contexture, environs, medium, milieu, mise-en-scène, setting, surround, surroundings, terrain Related Words: location, place, position, space; backdrop, background; element; situation, status; geography, habitat; microenvironment

(www.merriam-webster.com 2016)

The sheer number of synonyms with their unique meanings and flavors tells us of the diversity of the term *atmosphere*. It seems that the term is even meant to indicate something that is difficult to express, or used in order to hide the speaker's incapacity to verbalize something, that clearly has relevance (Böhme 1993, 113). On the other hand, atmospheres themselves can be characterized, by using many different words such as: serene, melancholic, oppressive, uplifting, inviting, erotic etc. Where an atmosphere is located is also unclear. It seems to be everywhere around us filling a space like a haze. Turning an atmosphere into a concept is only possible if its intermediary status between subject and object is accounted for. (Böhme 1993, 114.) In the test project of this thesis this means that the relationship between the visual, material and other features of the place (object) and how the user (subject) experiences them is accounted for. It needs to be clear that the surroundings affect a person, just as a person affects the surroundings. This interplay is always present

when experiencing a space. Atmosphere is between environmental qualities and human states (Böhme 1993, 114).

The reason why humans have the ability to grasp and comprehend the atmosphere of a space or an entire ladscape can be understood from the point of view of survival. The ability to instantly differentiate a dangerous setting from a safe one has given an evolutionary advantage. (Pallasmaa 2014, 236.)

Some spaces affect us more deeply and profoundly than others. This depends on many factors such as social, historical, cultural and political contexts in which the atmosphere emerges. Also the skill of the designer may have its affect through different qualities of the design, its materials, elements and structure. (Edensor & Sumartojo 2015, 252.) The power of architecture arises from its ability to strengthen the experience of the real. It calls for a re-sensitising to materiality, gravity and reality, as Juhani Pallasmaa states (2014, 240). The ways in which designed, or tuned atmospheres close down or open up meanings vary widely. The flashing lights, loud music, and distinctive food smells at fairgrounds are different from the ambience of a café or a pub, even though both are created to attract and retain customers. (Edensor & Sumartojo 2015, 253.)

Subjects co-produce and modify atmospheres in various ways also and charge them with particular qualities, which may not be foreseen by the designer. People are not merely passive figures with no control over their own sensory experience. The everyday atmosphere of a familiar setting is changed by something infrequent like a celebration, which we feel drawn to, because it promises us something or reminds us of something. Domestic atmospheres form an unnoticed backround for everyday life that is maintained through unreflexive habits. Stability like this becomes apparent only when something changes in it or it is returned to after a long absence. (Edensor & Sumartojo 2015, 252-260.) This can be felt to an astonishing degree in Helsinki, when Finland wins an international ice hockey tournament. The celebrating crowds change the mood of the whole city. People return to the feeling of 1995, when Finland won for the first time. Towns, buildings and objects are extensions of the collective memory of the community (Pallasmaa 2005, 78), and places cannot be described only by means of analytic concepts due to their complex nature. Through scientific abstraction the everyday life-world would go unnoticed (Nordberg-Schulz 1980, 6).

From a designer's point of view, being aware of past instances could be vital in understanding how the user is affected. A past trauma for instance may leave a trace, which only the user can sense in the particular setting where it took place. As opposed to this, something pleasant in the past may be attempted to recreate after it becomes known. Taking influences like these into consideration requires a possibility for them to be expressed. The designer may not know of them and therefore should look for ways of finding them out even when they are hidden in the past.

Architect Peter Zumthor (2006a, 21) describes his way of generating a certain atmosphere as being highly sensitive and individual. He depicts the process



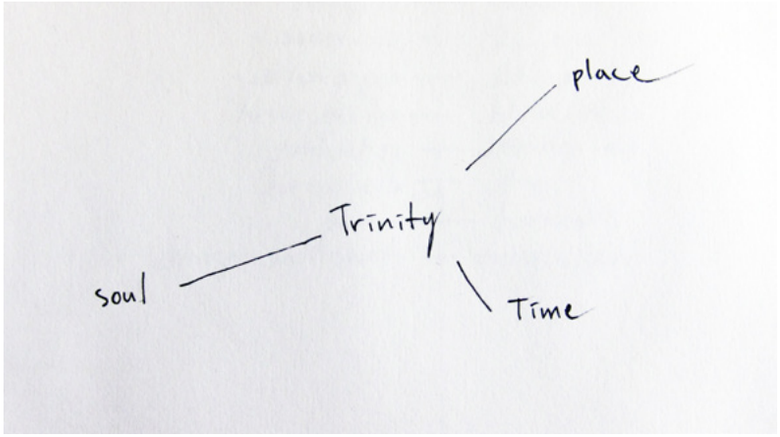
of designing the spa complex Therme Vals as an endeavour to answer basic questions posed by the given site, the mountains, rocks and water. Only after answering these questions, structures and spaces started to form in suprising ways. (2006b, 31.) This kind of way of designing spaces is kin to Juhani Pallasmaa's view on how art is experienced:

> *When experiencing a work of art, the whole gives meaning to the parts, not the other way round.*
> *We need to grasp and conceive complete images instead of singular elements, and, in fact, there are no 'elements' in the world of artistic expression; there are only complete poetic images intertwined with distinct emotive orientations.*
>
> (Pallasmaa 2014, 242.)

In a case like this the designer's individuality has a central role in the creative process. The designer functions as a conduit of atmosphere between object and subject. The place is felt and altered by the creative authority on behalf of the user. In fact, this becomes evident when looking at visualizations of unrealized architectural projects, where an "atmosphere" is added to the plan's presentation. Feelings exist on paper in two-dimensional form for only the eyes to see. The final outcome of the design is, in a way, lived in advance through the designer's imagination. The exclusively visual quality of the architecture of today can set aside our sensual emotions (Pallasmaa 2005, 75).

Zumthor himself states that architectural drawings only underline the inadequacy of any kind of portrayal of presence, and if the naturalism of the drawing is too great, the drawing itself becomes the object of desire (2006b, 12-13). On the other hand, personal and sometimes extraordinary experiences appear as important in a creative process. They often lie beyond the normative and are delicate. (Raami, Mielonen & Keinänen 2010, 257.) Personal descriptions of a creative process in spatial design are difficult to come by, perhaps because the details of the process are often unclear even to the designer.

Gernot Böhme (1993, 115-116) sees atmosphere as a part of a *new aesthetics*. According to him the old aesthetics was a theory of the language of art, concerned with the artist's communication through artistic work. The new aesthetics includes the experience of art through its atmosphere. Taking into account this relatively recent change in perspective, it is logical to see the experiencing and creating atmospheres still being the responsibility of the designer as the professional in answering questions of aesthetic nature.






## The Old Ways

In the past towns and buildings were built together by the people of that area for the people of that area. The different skills and abilities of people were put to use in the best possible way. This meant that the affect humans had on their environment came from the inner nature of the surroundings. It was a natural process of growth without the help of architects and planners. Buildings, villages, towns and cities grew and diminished according to the collective activities of their inhabitants. These processes were not identical in different places, but instead the succesful process of growth brought these places to life through their own uniqueness. (Alexander 1979, 7-8.)

The instinct to complete nature is in all of us like the instinct to procreate. The process of becoming a part of one's surroundings by changing those surroundings is the ancient basis of building. Everyone has this dream somewhere inside of them. Therefore all building processes are in fact parts of a single deeper process, which connects buildings to history, as it connects humans to their surroundings. Architect Christopher Alexander calls it *the timeless way of building*. He speakes of a language of patterns as the ultimate constituents of building. (Alexander 1979, 9-12.)

These patterns are made out of events that take place where there are people: movement, everyday activities, forces of nature, thesis writing, love, flowing of water, social situations etc. In other words: life and death (Alexander 1979, 62). There are also patterns of space surrounding those events. This includes all the structures, which the environment is made out of: houses, gardens, streets, sidewalks, shops, factories, parking lots etc. Buildings have their spatial patterns also such as: walls, windows, doors, rooms, stairs, doorhandles, balconies etc. Repeating these patterns creates the fabric of towns and cities. (Alexander 1979, 81-82) A place is an invitation and a suggestion to activity, and therefore spaces and architectural experiences are verbs (Pallasmaa 2014, 231). Observing these patterns and the sequence of people's activities gives a possibilty to compare different building processes through analysis. Taking into account the unique pattern language of a certain place is not a mechanical process, but it can be a method for building in an instinctive way, which makes places become vibrant and people in them feel like home. (Alexander 1979, 10-13.)

Alexander also speaks of the *quality without a name*, which is a subjective quality of a certain place. It is the root criterion of life and the thing that makes living environments become alive. It cannot be named, but it is always there in every place, building, town or city. Any system which has this quality needs to be one with its self and true to its inner forces. This quality is never the same, because it arises from the particular place in which it occurs. Everyone knows this quality, or the lack of it, but it is difficult to describe. It is what makes our environments good for us. (1979, 18-26.) We seek settings that have a history, because these connect us with a past life through imagination. Traces of life give us an experience of an atmosphere, that supports the continuation of life, and we feel safe. (Pallasmaa 2014, 240-250.)

*Place* is a term for an environment where something takes place. Nothing can happen without a reference to a certain location, which means that *place* is an integral part of existence. The term *place* means more than a geographical location. It encompasses the atmosphere, history and personal meanings of that environment. Everyday life consists of phenomena, which take place in everyday surroundings. The activity of people and the concrete things, which make their activity possible, determine the environmental character of a place, the spirit of it. (Nordberg-Schulz 1980, 6-8.) *Genius loci*, the spirit of place, is an old Roman concept, which originally meant that every independent being in this world had its *genius*, a guardian spirit. The spirit gave life to people and places, accompanied them through life and gave them their character or essence. (Nordberg-Schulz 1980,16.) The *spirit of place* has remained as the term for atmosphere, when a certain place is described. Juhani Pallasmaa connects the *spirit of place* and atmosphere in the following way:

*Genius loci, the Spirit of Place, is a similarly ephemeral, unfocused and non-material experiential character that is closely related with atmosphere; we can, indeed, speak of the atmosphere of a place, which gives it its unique perceptual character and identity.*
(2014, 231.)

Both terms, *the quality without a name* and *the spirit of place,* seem to describe a distinct atmosphere, which is difficult to grasp. A clear distinction between these terms is hard make and perhaps unnecessary to even try to make. However, it is clear that environments, which are desrcibed by using these terms, need both object and subject to exist. An atmosphere needs a place and a person, which are connected to each other by time.

But what happens when a designer is added to the method of *the timeless way of building*? How does an outsider, who does not have a temporal connection to the place, see its patterns and the affect of a design on the natural growth of the place? Christopher Alexander suggests that a change towards a better living environment, which has *the quality without a name*, can be made one pattern at a time. It requires that each step of the way is seen as a part of the whole. (1979, 390.) This has a connection with the way Juhani Pallasmaa suggests that the development of a design should start from the larger entity and follow down to the details (2014, 242). It was also the basis of designing in the three-week test project of this thesis.

Designers do not have the possibilty to be born and raised in every setting which is affected by their designs. It is impossible to make one's self a part of the past everywhere. Since the designer does not have the possibility of getting acquainted to *the spirit of place* in the deepest sense of the term, he or she could find ways of interacting with the people of that place in an empathic way. It could be done, for instance, by closely collaborating with a user, who has that connection to the place. This could prevent a situation where something foreign is superimposed on *the spirit of place* regardless of its existing atmosphere, and therefore prevent the



creation of a design that makes no one feel at home.

This way the connection between the user and the design would be the atmosphere, which is experienced by the user and not the one experienced by the designer. If possible the designer would not go between the object and subject, but hold the subject's atmospheric perception as a guideline when altering the object. In other words, the designer should not forget the soul of the person using his or her design. A designer acts within the limitations of his or her intellectual and cognitive powers, but the user of the created environment reacts with a full personality (Pallasmaa 2005, 75).

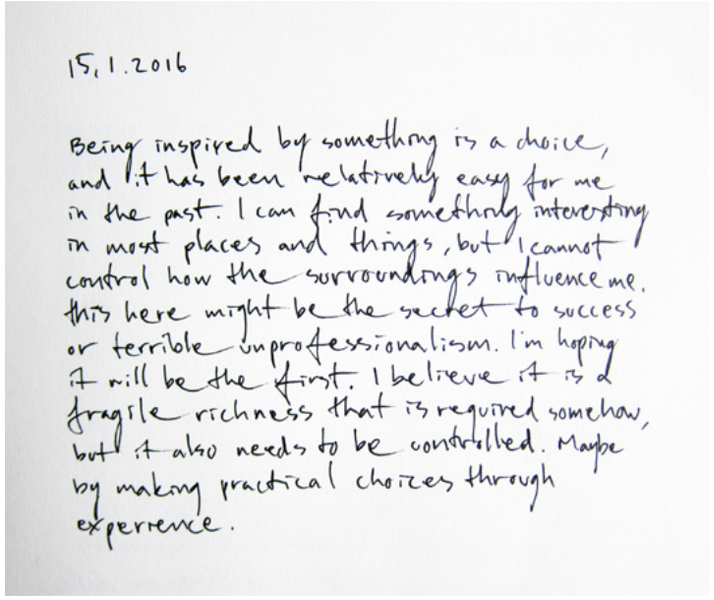
## Intuition and Spaces

Contemporary psychology divides human thinking into two faculties, which operate on two completely different areas: the intuitive system and the reasoning system. This is called the dual-process model. The process advances first from perception to intuition and then to reasoning. Perception is current and involves sensory stimulation. It can lead to a stimulus-bound reaction. Intuition (system 1) is an automatic reaction to perception. It is fast and effortless, but unconscious and uncontrolled. Reasoning (system 2), on the other hand, is slow and requires effort. It is governed by rules, but still remains flexible. Reasoning deals with conceptual representations of things such as time and language. Creativity takes place between intuition and reasoning. The unconscious and the conscious parts of the brain work together constantly and form the basis of thinking. (Raami 2015, 36-37 Figure 1.)

As mentioned before, the experince of atmosphere is intuitive. It relies on our fast associative abilities. Humans as animals instantly recognize the inherent nature of a place in relation to the biological world. The automatic ability to make a distinction between whether one is prey or threat in any environment is crucial to survival for all creatures. Between humans this means that we have the capacity to distinguish individual faces among thousands who look almost the same, and judge emotions on those faces on the basis of almost invisible expressions. (Pallasmaa 2014, 235-236.)

The human sensory perception of space is based on biology, but it is also culturally subjective. We share the same receptors for perceiving space, but we sometimes live in different perceptual worlds. The information received by our receptor systems is modified by culture. Our sensory receptors are divided into two categories: 1. the distance receptors concerned with examination of distant objects - the eyes, the ears and the nose; 2. the immediate receptors used to examine the world close up - skin, membranes and muscles. (Hall 1969, 41)

People from different cultures react to the information received from these receptors differently. For instance, the scope and need for personal space varies between cultures. Distance and touch between two interacting individuals are percieved biologically, but regulated according to cultural norms. These cultural





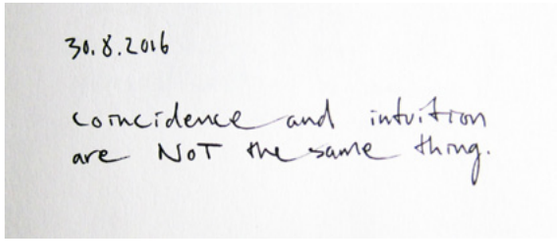

differences create different sensory worlds as people admit and filter sensory data. For instance, a person who grew up in a loud and hectic environment has adapted to his or her biotope, and can intuitively block out loud noises, which would otherwise create a disturbance. (Hall 1969, 2-4.)

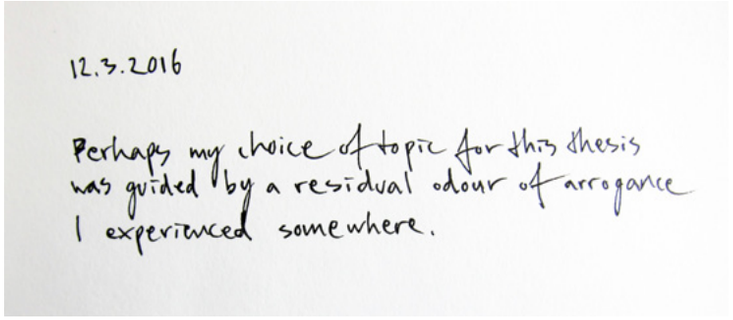
This means that the prevailing culture affects the before mentioned dual-process model of thinking: Perceived information is intuitively and automatically altered before anything is rationalised. The sensory worlds created by humans determine what kind of organisms those humans become (Hall 1969, 4). This affects our environments, for example, through territorial behaviour. We create boundaries and borders to control our space like other animals do. The basis of this behaviour is so deeply rooted in our biological history that we often forget the fact that it works behind our reasoning. (Hall 1969, 46.)

A space or a place is a multi-sensory image, a combination of our existential experience and cognition. The experiencing of a space as inviting and safe, or as hostile and dangerous, is a first hand judgement that is difficult to alter. Being attached to a setting or becoming alienated from it is an intuitive choice. (Pallasmaa 2014, 236.) The social dimension of atmosphere can be felt by anyone in everyday life. When entering a room full of people, we sense a possible tension or a relaxed mood intuitively even if it is contradictory to what was expected.

In some cases we can smell social atmospheres. The chemical basis of this is in our evolutionary past. Odour is one of the earliest and most basic forms of communication that exist in nature. We still can detect emotional states in each other by smell, even though our evolution has emphasized the development of visual detection. There can be a residual smell of anger, discontent, passion etc. filling a space and thus affecting how we sense its atmosphere. (Hall 1969, 46-49.) Once again, this sensation is faster than reason and therefore intuitive. And it affects our choices whether we know it or not. Since creativity takes place between intuition and reasoning, it seems fair to say that a creative process is affected in similar ways - it is also connected to culture and biology and their social dimensions.

Experienced designers can rely on their expertise in handling a creative process and their intuitive faculties. Their familiarity with their personal way of doing things helps them in situations where the creative process is not in their control. A person with less experience can benefit from practice, and learn to trust intuition in the right situations. Sensitivity is important for creativity and the understanding of one's intuition can be a key element in finding personal strenghts of creating. (Raami 2015, 138-140.) Precious moments of intuition result from patience and work (Zumthor 2006b, 21). Strong intuitive experiences in a creative process are often personal and extraordinary by their nature. They often lose their meaning if they are overly rationalised. An intuitive feeling needs a supportive environment for it to be understood and developed into a clear idea. An experienced designer is able to trust and defend intuition and prevent pregiven restrictions to hinder the creative process. (Raami etc. 2010, 257.)






Intuition has a central role in the research of this thesis. As we know, the experience of atmosphere is deeply connected with intuition. The process of gathering poetic knowledge is in fact the same as turning intuitive thinking into reasoning. The *poetic image* is intuitive. The true experience of art and architecture is intuitive. Also, the process of making a thesis relies on intuition just like any other creative process. The choice of topic for this thesis was made, or it happened, somewhat intuitively. Intuition also guided this work even in situations which did not seem special at the time.

The three-week test project of this thesis was an intuitive process in many ways. Planning it included many so-called "educated guesses", since a clearly similar method used by other spatial designers was not found. The project was lead by following intuition, because it had to have a relatively free structure in order to avoid putting too many restrictions on the test subjects, the users. There was no pre-existing structure to look to for comparison. The main intuitive input was of course that of the users. In other words, the structure of the test project followed the intuition of the designer, and the creative process in the test followed the intuition of the users. Or this is how it was planned.

The crucial role of intuition is recognized as a part of the creative process, and often after wards cited as having played an important role in the designer's work. When intuition is seen as something unique, which only the designer has access to, there lies the risk of intuition being treated as something supernatural instead of practical. Through experience, a designer could defend the user's intuition and give it the supporting environment it needs in order to develop into poetic knowledge.

## The Poetic Image

In this thesis I use the term *poetic* often. It is a description for phenomena which occur outside the realm of reasoning. It tells of experiences which are not measured scientifically, but of those which are felt. It is used to differentiate two perspectives on the world, the poetic and the scientific.

The term *poetic* originates from the Greek word *poesis*, which means: making, acting, bringing into being, making in mind. It does not refer only to a theory of poetry, but to a broader field of knowledge of relations between matter and thought. It can be a source of information for ways of acting, feeling, thinking and producing in different fields. The notion of poetics emerging in the field of knowledge production blurs the dichotomy between the material and the ideal. *Poetic knowledge* is a form of primary intelligence, which relies on our sensibility to form intuitions of the nature of the environment around us. (Berlemont et al. 2014, 2-3.) In other words, to experience an atmosphere means to know something of the world around us poetically.

*Poetic image* is a term in philosophy for an intuitive product of the imagination. It is how the unconscious human psyche "sees" poetry or a poetic experience. The term can be connected to any poetic experience - it does not

necessarily refer to a poem, or to a visual image. When we read a book, hear music, experience art or an atmosphere, the *poetic image* is the world, which is created by our imagination to comprehend what we are experiencing. For example, it is how we imagine what a poet imagined, when he or she was writing the poem we are reading.

When reading, we move effortlessly from one setting to another in the story. Through the words of the author, we construct situations in our imagination as if they existed in physical reality and had always been there. These imaginary spaces do not appear to us as pictures but in their full spatiality and atmosphere. The same applies to our dreams. Our ability to imaginatively project the settings of an entire novel is similar to our innate capacity to grasp atmospheres and moods in a space. (Pallasmaa 2014, 239.) Poetry is able to concretise phenomena which elude scientific explanations. Therefore it can also be used as a source of information. (Nordberg-Schulz 1980, 8.) Perhaps art exists because of this very reason.

According to Gernot Böhme traditional aesthetics is a method for understanding meanings in art. It seeks to assess what is the artist's message in a certain piece of art. All works of art are seen as a symbol of something through which the artist communicates. Böhme's *new aesthetics* is concerned with investigating the atmosphere, or the *aura*, of a work of art. He sees aesthetic work as the production of atmospheres. A work of art does not have to mean anything. It may refer only to itself, be its own universe and create its own atmosphere. This overcomes the restriction of communication, as art can just be felt without discussion. Too much interpretation would cut out the atmosphere of a work of art. (Böhme 1993, 114-120.) Even though Böhme does not speak of architecture and spatial atmospheres, it seems fair to say that these do not need to mean anything either. The poetic image they evoke can just be felt.

Philosopher Gaston Bachelard describes the poetic image as a sudden clarity on the surface of the psyche. Each new poetic image has a dynamism and entity of its own and therefore it has no relation to recent history. It is not simply an echo from the past, but a reverberation in a person's whole existence, which takes place in the current moment. It is independent of causality, which means that there is no clear cause for the reaction - psychology cannot explain why the poetic image emerged as it did. (Bachelard 1964/1958, XV-XVI.)

Bachelard adds that when studying the problems posed by the poetic imagination one must forget rationalism. As the poetic image is always new when it appears, it cannot be studied through any kind of principle or theory, otherwise every image would require a theory of its own. Any kind of general basis used for understanding the image would be disastrous, because it would interfere with the essential novelty of the image. (Bachelard 1964/1958, XV.)

Materials can also awaken intuition. Everyday objects, art works and natural elements all radiate atmosphere (Böhme 1993, 123). They can have meanings which are not intentionally created or invented. Instead, they are hidden in the physical object itself and must be discovered. Art and architecure can reveal those meanings,



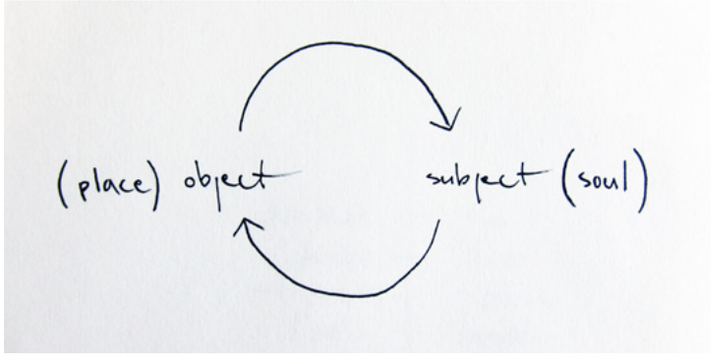
which otherwise may reside mute in the material. Materials, when used in a way which is loyal to their true characteristics, remind us of the forces of nature and connect our bodies to the physical world. If materials were mute to us, spaces would feel hollow and meaningless. Stone is heavy. We know this from experience, and this is one of the things which stone as a material tells us. We feel its weight just by looking at it. In its barest form it has meaning which is higher than any meaning created by humans. This is called material transcendence. It refers to an attribute in the material, which is beyond reasoning. (Harries 2000, 12-17.)

Materials have also personal meanings. They can be connected to memories and past experiences through our senses. The feel or scent of a certain material can add a temporal dimension to the experience of atmosphere, to the poetic image. This is also intuitive. Any kind of reasoning would drive a wedge between matter and meaning and reduce the material to mere material (Harries 2000, 16).

In relation to the questions this thesis seeks to answer, the most important aspect of the poetic image is its communicability. Since an experience of atmosphere comes to us as a sudden image, that image needs to be somehow communicated from the user to the designer. Only then can poetic knowledge gathering function as a concrete tool in the design process.

Although poetic experiences are personal, they can be shared to an extent, as we see in the case of literature, for instance. Humans have a unique ability to be deeply touched by a work of art made by someone we don't know, made under circumstances that may be unknown to all. This happens intuitively. The image touches the soul before touching the mind. In this process a world created by a stranger becomes our own. This means that the poetic image is personal, but transsubjective. It can be shared, but not by using logic. A critical attitude stifles the reverberation of the image, which dissappers fast in any case. Trying to describe one's feelings forces the image to escape, and it cannot be intellectualized without getting tangled in a mess of interpretations. (Bachelard 1964/1958, XIX-XXIV.)

This was the biggest challenge of the three-week test project. Since there can be no general basis for the studying of any single experience of atmosphere, it seems that a design process, which aims at exploiting such an experience, can only be a framework inside which the participants can work freely. Sharing the experience of atmosphere must be done carefully, without scaring away the poetic image. In the case of the test project, facilitating such a process was the task of the spatial designer, me.






## Personal Atmosphere Experiment

In order to learn how I experience atmospheres as a user, I made an experiment where I intentionally went to a place where I had spent time in the past. I wanted to know whether there was something left of the atmosphere I once knew. In making this experiment I was fully aware that returning to a place just to experience its atmosphere is already a charged situation, where my intentions may affect the experience. The place I chose for the experiment was my former place of work, the Helsinki City Theatre. I had always felt its atmosphere to be unique in many ways and even when working there I had felt strangely at home. The theater itself is an acclaimed architectural site, which is a fact that I did not know when I first entered its atmosphere over ten years prior to this experiment. I just liked it for what it was.

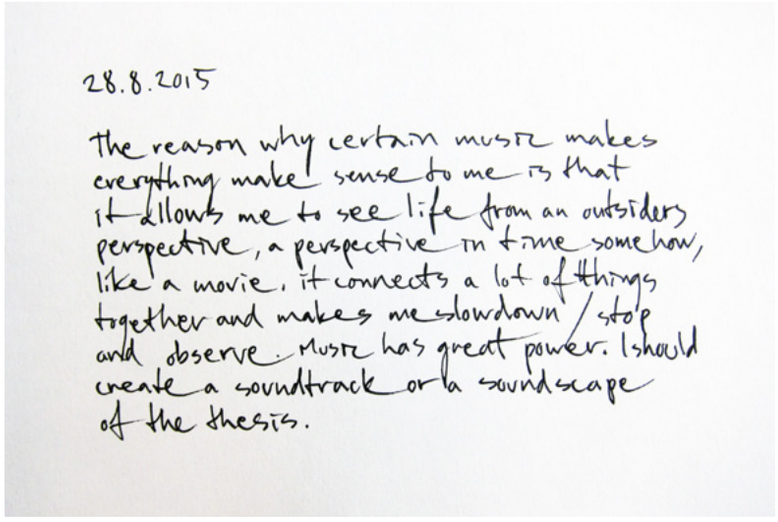
At the time of my experiment the theater was undergoing renovation which gave it an extra dimension - I knew the experience was going to be different. This created a situation where I was already expecting something drastic from the experiment which, in turn, risked my experience there to be affected even more.

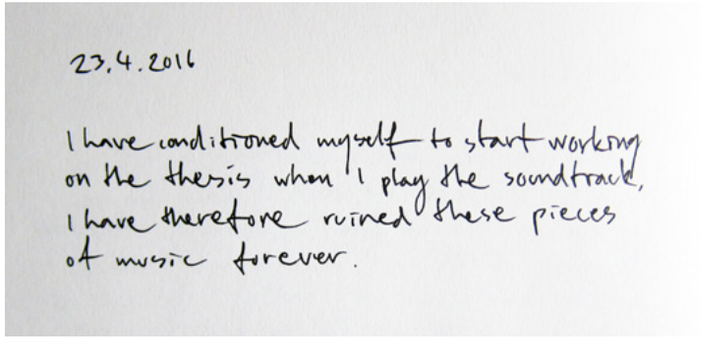
Walking into the places where I had been and which atmospheres were dear to me was more emotional than I had expected. Not because it evoked memories, but becuase it did not. It was like walking through a rough rendering of the place. Familiar smells, sounds, materials and views were either gone or hidden. The shapes of the spaces were still there, but only as a reminder of the fact that this is still the same place. It was like visiting an old acquaintance in a hospital. The situation is different, the time is different and much has changed. It felt as if the building was sick. Which it in fact was, since it was being renovated. I was suprised by the impact of the new atmosphere. After the visit I saw the surrounding area of the building differently also. I had no reason to be there anymore. It felt similar to visiting a city where you used to know people, but those poeple are now gone and so is the reason to visit.

The fact that I went there to intentionally experience something did not prevent the experience from happening, even though the situation was completely different from before. Not only was I mentally prepared for experimenting, but I also wore the mandatory safety gear of a construction site and I was escorted. It is impossible to tell whether or not it would have felt different had I been there by accident.

The result of the theatre experiment was influenced by its nature of being an artificial test. I realised that I needed to find another atmosphere which I had been subjected to without any kind of analysis involved in the experience. Something that had affected me in a way which I had not monitored at the time. This way I could look into an experience which is free of intent.

What occurred to me was that I had been swimming often during the process of writing this thesis. I had used it as a balancing factor to working, because it involves concentration of the body instead of the mind. What I had not thought of was that being under water is literally being in another world. Swimming means






entering into a different soundscape where rhytmns of breathing and movements in the water are audible and the rest of the world is not. It can have atmospherical affects to the extent of thoughts being left behind. Thoughts which were occupying the rational mind above the surface. It gives a possibility to access a state of mind where absentmindedness is good and oblivion is even better. Like sleeping. As mentioned before, Juhani Pallasmaa describes spaces and architectural experiences as being verbs (Pallasmaa 2014, 231). *To swim* is surely one of those. Interestingly, one of the rare situations where human eyes can see the complete 360 degrees of horizon is when floating on ones back in calm water between the atmospheres found above and below the surface. I had been in the world under water to relax my mind.

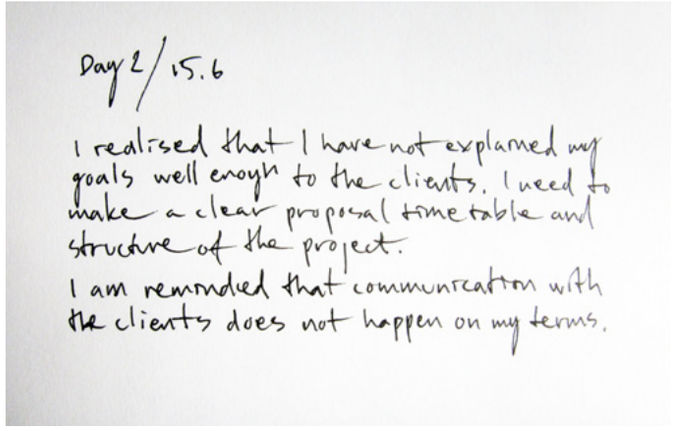
After realizing this I went back swimming and tried to consciously sense the atmosphere. As I went into the water I instantly forgot what I was supposed to be doing. When it came back to me, I was able to start thinking of the atmosphere several times only to forget it again and again. This experiment resulted in a series of sporadic beginnings of sentences heard somewhere in the back of my mind. Like thoughts at the moment when you are about to fall asleep. Thoughts which begin normally, but dissolve into randomness every time. Or like a song which you know only the first three words and those words keep repeating in your head as if hoping that more lyrics would appear by doing so.

It seems that the atmosphere of swimming resembles that of running with earplugs on. It combines the mantra-like repetition of movement with auditory isolation. Words become replaced with breathing and movement. When the body concentrates, the mind does not have to and thoughts begin to wander. In swimming the actual physical immersion in water hightens this experience.

What I learned from these experiments was that it is impossible to control the experience of atmosphere. The poetic image emerges as it does, and preconceptions do not mean as much as I thought they would. Planned experiencing is not necessarily meaningless. I also noted that, when consciously experiencing a place, it is crucial to instantly record the findings. Repetition of the experience in ones mind means that an automatic analysis takes place to some extent and therefore the findings are not as pure as they could be. The experiments supported the view that atmosphere is conntected more to the material and sensory qualities of the space than to its dimensions and structures. The social aspect of the experience became apparent in the theatre experiment, where much of the atmosphere was gone because the familiar people were gone. As for the experience of spaces being verbs; *to swim*, *to work*, *to interact* and *to monitor* all affect the atmosphere and essentially make a place different according to the agency of the observer. Atmospheres can surprise.

# Existing Methods

-Empathic design
-Design probes
-Practice-led reasearch
-Two examples of empathy






## Empathic Design

Empathy is an imaginative perspective into another person's situation. It attempts to capture someone else's emotional and motivational qualities. (Koskinen & Battarbee 2003, 45.) Being empathic is to care for the other person's feelings.

Empathic design is a user-centered method of creating products, which takes into account the user's experience. This is a subjective factor, which designers consider to be essential alongside with the mere function of the product. Empathic methods require contanct with the user in order for the designer to effectively understand how people understand themselves. Often the designer asks the user to imagine and dream a future world where the design would be used. Exercises like these can be rewarding also for the user. Empathic methods are usually visual or tactile: they provide not only data, but also inspiration for the designer. For the product to work in the corporate reality, in other words, for it to sell, the methods for creating it must be tested in reality. (Koskinen 2003, 7-8.)

Markets have understood the need for more personal products - the reflective qualities of products can be turned into economic value. A product can simply be viewed as a tool, or it can be viewed through the context in which the user sees it. People buy products, which reflect their own identities in the brand, trend, status or other qualities of the product. People want to be associated with a product, which they feel represents their personality. In light of this, it is clear why translating experiences and emotions to products has become an important part of the design scene. Designers are asked to give tangible form to elusive experiences. (Koskinen & Battarbee 2003, 38-39.)

People give meaning to products by interacting with them, by acting, thinking and discussing about them. There is also a temporal dimension to this. When something is expected from the product it creates a *pre-experience* of it, which can lead to a surprise. The *post-experience* is a more informed one. Such meanings can last in the product for a lifetime. This affects the experience of the product. The phenomenon of product experience has been studied in different disciplines such as sociology, psychology, marketing and design, with varying terminology. (Koskinen & Battarbee 2003, 40-42.)

Designers work for other people who have different lives and habits, which result in different expectations and preferences. They cannot expect everyone else to be like themselves and experience the world in the same way. On the other hand, if the designer makes a distinction between him or herself as the professional and *them*, as the user, the view is too objective and distances the designer from the human needs of the user. Empathic design is about working between these two ideas. It is about making sense of people's differences. (Fulton Suri 2003, 52.)

This calls for observation with empathy. Objective scientific observation is not enough for understanding people's emotions, motivations and preferences or inner conflicts. This is important, because these are what make up the user's experience. Empathy is our intuitive ability for understanding people's inner states

based on their behaviour. A balance between subjective empathy and objective observation is required in relating to the user. (Fulton Suri 2003, 53.)

Designers can achieve a deeper understanding of the users in many empathic ways. These range in the level of participation on the designer's part. For instance, by looking into what people really do with the designer's prototypes in natural settings, or by asking people to participate in making records of their behaviour and feelings. The designer can also try things for themselves to understand more personally the experiences of others. Other similar activities include role-playing, storytelling, interviewing, experience prototyping etc. (Fulton Suri 2003, 54-57.)

Researchers Koskinen and Battarbee suggest that, even though designers think of the user throughout the different stages of a project, the most efficient place for empathy would be in the early conceptual part of the product development process. Particularly, in the preparing stage of concept search where possible new kinds of products are searched for and new needs of the users have not been defined yet. (Koskinen & Battarbee 2003, 49.)

In the test project of this thesis I as the designer tried out the atmosphere of the test site myself. Since I was there on location it happened without my choice. Contact with the user was frequent, and the process was more about observing the atmosphere together, instead of the designer observing the behaviour of the user. Gathering poetic knowledge from a user's experience of atmosphere happened by the user observing the natural setting of the building site.

This thesis is research about *spatial design*. Almost all design is *user-centred*. The project was *co-design,* since it involved cooperation with the user. And in a way, it could be called *service design* also, since instead of giving the user a finished product, the aim was to find out the user's needs first and service those needs. The accurate distinctions of these terms are unknown to all except design researchers. Fixating on one of many overlapping terms is perhaps not beneficial, but since the methods of this research should be defined, the one closest to the truth for the test project would be *empathic design*.

## Design Probes

Design probes are an approach of user-centred design for understanding users in an empathic way and exploring design opportunities. They represent one of the answers to the challenges facing traditional design methods in a changing world. New methods like these are developed continuously, especially for the concept design stages. (Mattelmäki 2008, 39.)

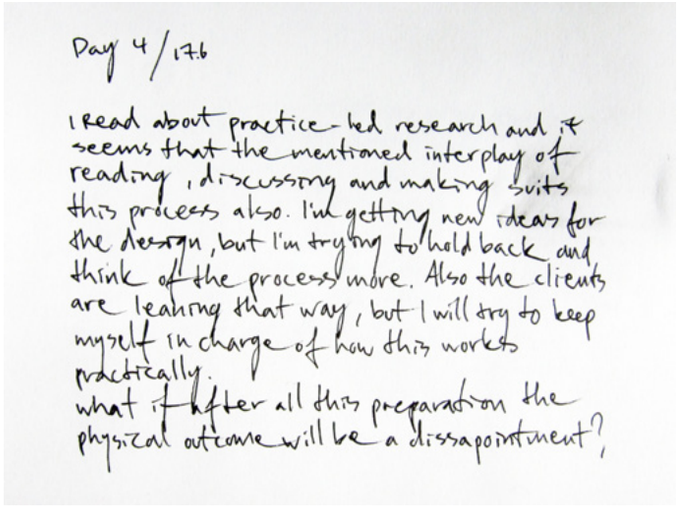
Empathic design does not seek solutions for recognised problems, but instead looks for opportunities to develop a holistic understanding of the user. It is not always possible to observe people's everyday world for practical, ethical and economic reasons. Design probes are empathic tools for this purpose. They give users a possibilty for reflecting and communicating their opinions and feelings to the designer. This way data is gathered about people's actions in their natural contexts. (Mattelmäki 2003, 119-120.)

This method often includes providing the user with a physical probe kit. The kit package contains typically visual documentation elements like a camera, a diary for understanding the user's actions and routines, a set of questions and tasks for the user and possibly objects which functions as stimulators or reminders for the user during the study. (Mattelmäki 2003, 123.) Technology has given the opportunity to include interactive equipment in the kit such as video and mobile probes and communication devices. (Mattelmäki 2008, 48.) The probe kits and probing methods need to be updated, so that the research process does not grow stagnant. To find fresh approaches for designs the process must be redesigned frequenlty enough. (Mattelmäki 2008, 102.)

Design probes can be used for different reasons: They can be a source of inspiration for the designer and the user. Open-ended, provocative and sometimes weird exercises can open new horizons in the midst of daily routines. They can provide material, which does not need to be handled by scientific methods and they can encourage the designer to approach users more freely. Design probes can be used for collecting information about potential users, their experiences, attitudes and needs. In the early stages of product concept design the challenge is often to find research problems. Probes can find signals of interesting opportunities in difficult or restricted settings where the designer cannot be present. One reason for using design probes is to create an incentive for participation. Probes can offer users a chance to take part in the design process. For instance, people can be given a prototype to try out in everyday use. By analysing the user's experience with the prototype designers can find solutions for developing it to better suit the needs of the user. Design probes can also function as agents for dialogue, since the process often involves meetings and communication between researchers, users and designers. Contact like this enables the designer to see the users as real people and thus motivation for empathizing with them is stronger. Probes also sensitise the users to the subject and prepare them for the dialogue. (Mattelmäki 2008, 58-61.)

Design prototypes can be domesticated in order to collect responses provoked by them. By doing this the designer can compare the collected responses to intended ones and see how, where and in which situations the prototype was actually used. For the user this offers a chance to reflect on personal values, experiences and attitudes. (Routarinne 2009, 1.)

The material gathered by design probes can be interpreted as qualitative research for understanding a certain subject. A scientific analysis is often not necessary and better terms for understanding the results would be: making sense, outlining or interpreting. These interpretations are subjective and therefore discussing the material in a group can be beneficial, because a variety of views can enrich the results. (Mattelmäki 2008, 88-89.)


Day 4/17.6

I read about practice-led research and it seems that the mentioned interplay of reading, discussing and making suits this process also. I'm getting new ideas for the design, but I'm trying to hold back and think of the process more. Also the clients are leaning that way, but I will try to keep myself in charge of how this works practically.
what if after all this preparation the physical outcome will be a dissapointment?



Design probes were used in different ways in the three-week test project of this thesis. The users were given homework assignments right from the beginning of the process. This was done to understand the users' reasons for selecting that particular site and the motivation for developing it. Field trips were taken in order to grasp the spirit of the area and to get acquainted with the surrounding nature, mainly for the sake of the designer. My role as the designer was to act as a domesticated probe. I was accepted into the realm of the users' to find out about their experience of atmosphere through discussions, which were all recorded. In the process I was able to gather material about the views and feelings of the users and monitor the process itself as a tool for empathic design. In this test the designer was an active artefact of sorts, which the users welcomed into their world. Whether or not this artefact was capable of empathy is debatable. In any case, the users were given a chance to contemplate the many meanings the place has for them and their reasons for being there.

Given the difficulty of elaborating atmosphere and the fact that explanations of it often only diffuse the poetic image, design probes seemed to be a good method for research in this case. No clear questions could be given without the risk of leading the thoughts of the participants and therefore open discussion, ambiguous homework assignments and simply being there were logical ways of gathering knowledge.

**Practice-led Research**

Practice-led research is a method of knowledge production through artistic or design practice. It is applied in different areas of art – including dance, theatre, music, architecture, fine arts and design. It seeks interesting ways to use art practice in research, through its unique position in the academe. In practice-led research the researcher is the practitioner, the maker of art or design, and by documenting the artistic process new knowledge is found. (Mäkelä &Routarinne 2006, 12-15.)

The aim of practice-led research is to create experiental knowledge. It does not aim at a single objective truth. This kind of research is a holistic process, where everything interplays with everything and where interpretation happens in a context. Experiental knowledge is emotional and embodied in nature. This means that it is subjective, and therefore it is of vital importance that the research process is transparent. This should be seen in the result of the research, so that the research choices made during the process can be readily followed by others. The choices need to be explained and justified by means of argumentation and with the help of comments and criticism. (Turpeinen 2006, 121-124.) Practice-led research can have its motivation in either practice or research, but it must meet the same requirements of rigour and knowledge production as all scientific research. (Mäkelä &Routarinne 2006, 13.)

The product of a creative process, be its form or medium anything between a painting and a dance performance, is seen as a central part of the research (Mäkelä &Routarinne 2006, 12). Knowledge is not only embodied in the artefacts, but also gained in the process of making them and reflected upon in the written presentation of the research (Turpeinen 2006, 122).

Creative practice is often the mixture of things discovered by chance. These chance occurrences can become discoveries through unspoken but intentional perception, or, on other occasions, by a defined method and a goal. Those moments, where intention and accident collide, are places from where creative practices, both artistic and scientific, draw their strengths and particularities. Both types of practice use these collisions in their own particular ways. (Mäkelä & O'Riley 2012, 10.)

Artist Outi Turpeinen describes her practice-led research as being a process of interplay between making, reading, collaborating and experimenting. The shape of the process is not known to her until it is followed through. The key to it is simultaneity. Emphasis is laid on simultaneous writing and analysing during the process, not only after each artistic production. Research questions are reworked from different perspectives repeatedly during and after the process of making art productions until they form a unity. The aim is not to produce singular "truths" about an issue, but instead to analyse the process of meaning creation. (Turpeinen 2006, 120-123.)

In her research through the making of exhibition design Turpeinen ponders the problematics of turning a spatial installation to written form, since a space is different in nature to linear text: a space has many meanings layered three dimensionally. However, the research text needs to exist independent of the space, with only the help of photographs, similar to any academic research. The research objects need to exist in some form in the presentation of the research after they have lost their original physical form. (Turpeinen 2006, 127.)

The method of research in this thesis is a combination of design probes and practice-led research. The poetic content of the three-week test project was gathered by using design probes. The test project can be seen as a process of designing - it aimed at a design by analysing the input of the user. The designer's role during the project was to function as a domesticated design probe and to facilitate the user's poetic experiencing.

The project as a whole was studied as practice-led research. Since no clear predecessor for this kind of spatial design method was found, the project itself was designed to fit unique requirements, which means that the outcome of the research is interpretative as it is filtered through the practice of one designer, me. It also means that the research process is presented in this thesis as transparently and as honestly as possible with its faults and disappointments.

In this research the designer had a dual role, since knowledge was gathered both within the project and of the project: One as the practitioner of design for the user's benefit and one as the researcher for his own benefit. In other words, the user's subjective knowledge was researched through the designer's subjective practice. Needless to say, that this thesis does not seek to find a definitive truth about anything.



## Two Examples of Empathy

The relationship between the user and the designer and their relation to environmental circumstances and constraints have inspired researchers, designers and artists in many ways. Their practices have shed light on the subject and its problematics from different viewpoints. The following are two examples with different angles of inquiry for making sense and bringing into discussion some of the topics, which also concern this thesis.

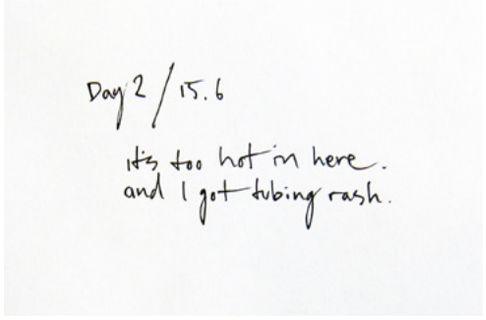
The research group Radical Materiality at the KU Leuven, Faculty of Architecture, campus Sint-Lucas Brussels, have developed a tactic called Poetic measuring for poetic knowledge production. It involves a staged disruptive encounter as a specific type of sense making. The result of this is a series of site-specific interventions and installations, where material artefacts, or architectural constructs, act as a catalyst for exploring their specific qualities when placed in new contexts. Perceiving these sometimes familiar objects in an unusual context forces a person to form a different bodily relation to the object. (Berlemont et al. 2014, 1-7.)

Poetically measuring a site can mean, for instance, understanding its typology in an embodied way. Technical measuring can produce a completely different view of the site compared to how it is perceived. This can be made evident when an artefact or a design highlights the diffuse, poetic properties of the site. For example, concrete poured on the ground forms a pattern with gravity and earth's surface (see appendix). Its shape and edges are determined by the contours of the ground. The concrete puddle as an artefact strengthens the implicit qualities of the ground by making them visible. (Berlemont et al. 2014, 7-8.) Paths in nature settings are formed similarly. They are not measured and drawn on paper, but instead the rocks, trees, other plants and objects there give the path its shape. The path is created with empathy for the place.

Architect Alex Schweder works with architecture and performance art to complicate the distinction between occupying subjects and occupied objects - users and architecture. His installation *Stability*, made in collaboration with Ward Shelley, is a caricature of the negotiations of space, which are played out in everyday life (see appendix). It is a level space dependent on the position and weight of the two occupants in relation to one another. Like a seesaw, it is a long beam with a central pivot, where the living/working structures are located at both ends of the structure. The installation is occupied by two persons, whose movement and actions define the balance of the whole structure. This represents the affect of the desires and habits of the occupying subjects on the architectural object they are occupying. What happens to a building when it is lived in is not controlled by the architect, but by the inhabitants. (www.alexschweder.com 2016.)

# The Test Project

-Overview
-Gathered material and participants
-Analysis
-Improved version






## Overview

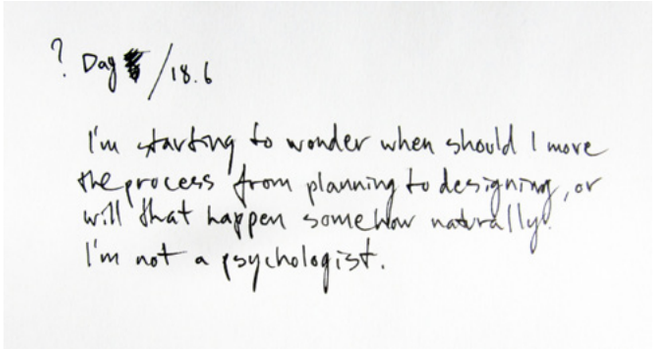
To understand the possibilities of communicating an atmospheric experience of the user to the designer, and of developing a tool which designers could use to create spaces in a more empathic way, a test project needed to be done. The idea was to stage an encounter between a test site, the users and the designer. This turned out to be a three-week process of close contact workshopping. The aim was to use design probes, such as homework assigments and discussions as a method of gathering poetic knowledge, which would then be used as a guideline and inspiration for a design. The atmosphere of the site experienced by the users was the basis of the whole process. My role as the designer was to facilitate this process, record it and take part in the designing.

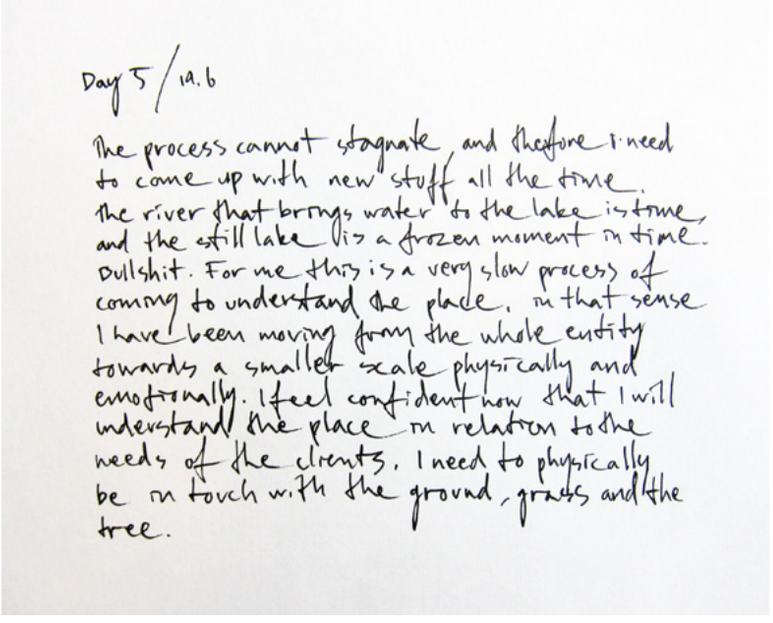
The test project took place near the town of Murphy, North Carolina in the United States of America, on a property owned by its users. The test site is located on a grassy lake front amidst rural country and rivers with the Appalachian mountains not far away (see appendix). Since the topic of the research had to do with experiencing places and spaces sensorially, it seemed fitting for the the test project to take place in such a rich natural environment. This was not a requirement for the test to be possible, but the function of the property as a summer cabin gave the project a certain level of freedom, which might not have been possible in a more urban home setting. The vicinity of nature was a bonus. Any kind of setting would have had its unique atmosphere as inspiration.

The test project was realised over a time period of three weeks in June of 2015. When the test began, only the scale of it was known since everything needed to be done during a limited amount of time. A decision about the function of the design had not been made. No one knew what the design actually needed to be. I did not want to influence the test subjects, the users, in their decisions about what their functional needs were before the test began. I also wanted to know as little as possible about the test site. Not knowing exact details of what was to happen was a concious decision, a choice made to prevent me from starting to design something in my head too early in the process and so prevent the design from becoming contaminated with my personal hopes and dreams.

There is also a reason for why the test took place in a previously unfamiliar environment to me. A true first impression of a new environment might give vital input to the design, and more importantly, working within a foreign culture in a foreign country might help get rid of some preconceptions of what the users want.

Being totally immersed in the *spirit of* the *place* during the test process was seen as a key factor. Through this immersion the atmosphere was to be translated to the design and made possible to be sensed objectively by anyone using the design. This way the users, which were the clients of this project, would receive a personal and extremely site-specific spatial design that would instantly become a part of the emotional and temporal landscape of the place.



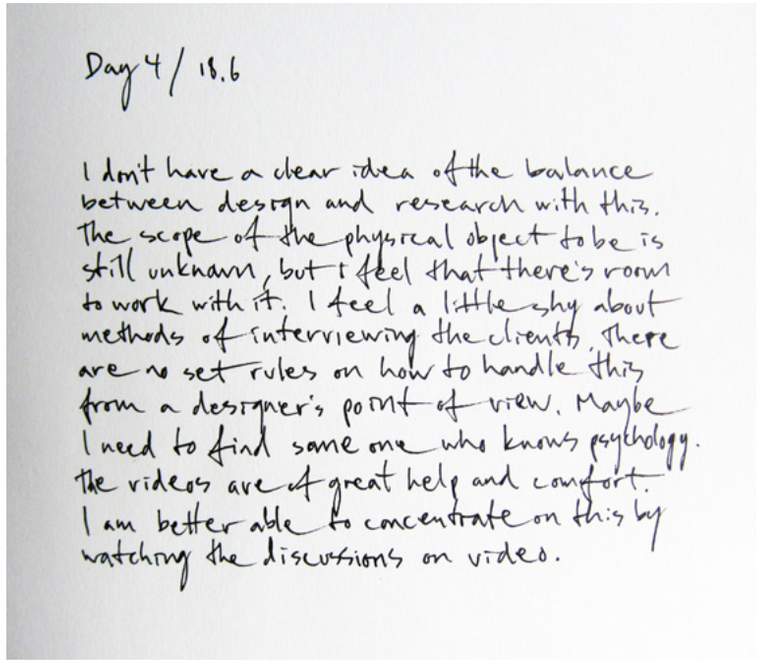

The original plan was that the participants in the test would use the poetic knowledge gathered from the probe material as a guideline and together design and build a physical construction of some sort. Perhaps a sauna, or an outdoor kitchen, or something else of that calibre. The spatial qualities of that construction could then have been tested in use and compared to the prevailing atmosphere of the place. This would have given insight into how a design can add or take away from the subjective atmosphere of a certain place. Also, into how a product of this kind of design method would fit into the interpersonal atmosphere of the place - how it would blend in with the cultural, social, regional and national contexts.

Many questions were to be answered by making the test project. These questions of course changed during and after the project. As has been stated often: if the goals do not change during the process, nothing has been learned. What happened in reality was that the process took on a life of its own and some of the initial questions turned irrelevant. Some questions were not answered at all whereas new ones emerged.

In a nut shell, the outcome of the test project was that through reflection the users came to a decision that it was not sensible to invest in building anything new at that moment. They had purchased the property only a few months prior to the test. It already had a building there as a base for spending time and planning future development. Perhaps in a way the test told them in concrete terms something they had already felt. This changed the research to some extent. Even though the test did not result in any kind of physical design which could have been tested, it was still an honest result. It was more honest than I wanted it to be at the time.

This outcome changed the relevance of some of the questions posed prior to the test. Since no design was finished or built, the possibility to try out and see whether a physical object would represent the atmosphere which inspired its creation, was not possible. The focus of the research shifted from how a designer can practically use other people's intuition to examining the communicability of the intuitive experience, the poetic image. Therefore the question of the affect of a building site's first impression on the designer lost its meaning, among others. The atmospheric impact of materials was not looked into either, since the project did not reach a stage of materiality.

After the three weeks of testing the research was at a point where its value could only be seen in the interesting journey which led to a slightly dissapponting, yet honest result. The journey, in turn, answered a lot of questions. Many of them of a more philosophical and personal nature than was originally intended.


Day 4 / 18.6

I don't have a clear idea of the balance between design and research with this. The scope of the physical object to be is still unknown, but I feel that there's room to work with it. I feel a little shy about methods of interviewing the clients. There are no set rules on how to handle this from a designer's point of view. Maybe I need to find some one who knows psychology. The videos are of great help and comfort. I am better able to concentrate on this by watching the discussions on video.



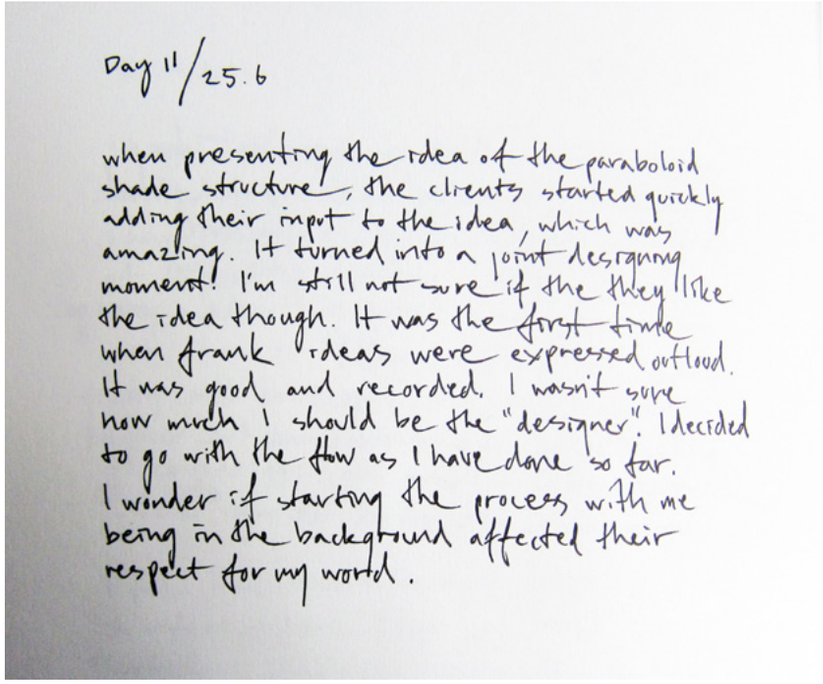
## Gathered Material and Participants

The test project was documented from start to finish. All planned discussions between the users and myself were filmed, which amounted to approximately eight hours of footage in ten separate discussions. The homework assigments given to the users were written down (see appendix). Aside from these, a number of photos, skecthes, animations and my personal project diary can be added to the list of material. For instance, the users organised a barbeque party at the site, and to see where people move I made a timelapse animation of it. This and other sketches and mockups were made to test emerging ideas. I do not see it as being useful to present the full content of the material here, since the focus of this thesis is in researching the process of events during the test project instead of the creative result of it, since there was none.

The most important material for tracking the sequence of events during the test project are the video discussions. After each discussion I went through the video and used it for preparing for the next discussion and the next homework assignments. The idea was to start from the big picture and then move on to details, which meant that we began by talking about things that had no apparent connection to any design. About things such as the youth memories of the users. Since there were no ready-made questions that I could have asked the users, the discussions were open-ended and especially in the beginning of the process also unplanned in their content.

I was careful not to bring *atmosphere* in to the discussion as a concept, because that could have led the participants to concsciously seek some kind of intentional experience, instead of one free from expectations. In fact, the word *brewery* is mentioned in the discussions more often than the word *atmosphere*. In its own way this tells of the vast field of subjects we touched upon during the probing.

Every evening by looking at the most recent video I tried to already see what had been the most important things mentioned that day. I used this kind of drive-by analysis to find meaningful questions and to steer the process. Topics for the homework assignments were found from the discussions and the assignments provided content for the next discussions. We started with a general discussion about the process and what we were doing. The first homework assignment for the users was to write one page about their ideal *nice day at the cabin*. Once the assignments were done and turned in to me, I went through them and selected what to my understanding had been the most inspiring and meaningful content. This combination of two people's ideal days at the cabin gave the topic for the next assignment, which was *shared tranquillity*. The users' ideas about shared tranquillity led the next discussions and so on. I also asked the users to dream about their time at the summer cabin, the test project site, and write it down to find interesting things to talk about. The motivation for this assignment also came from the discussions, and there was a suprising connection with a dream written down by one of the users and the test project. It was personal.


Day 11/25.6

when presenting the idea of the paraboloid shade structure, the clients started quickly adding their input to the idea, which was amazing. It turned into a joint designing moment! I'm still not sure if the they like the idea though. It was the first time when frank ideas were expressed outloud. It was good and recorded. I wasn't sure how much I should be the "designer". I decided to go with the flow as I have done so far. I wonder if starting the process with me being in the background affected their respect for my world.



Through these discussions and homeworks we ended up sketching a structure for shade which could shelter both tranquil nature watching, which was important to one user, and guests at get-togethers, which was important for the other user. The barbeque party showed us the place where that shade could be. Making mockups of that shade design advanced the discussions futher on. During the test project I noticed that the video discussions became more beneficial than the homework assignments to the progress of the test and so I focused mainly on them. Aside from the few excursions we made to nearby areas, all of this was done on location at the test site.

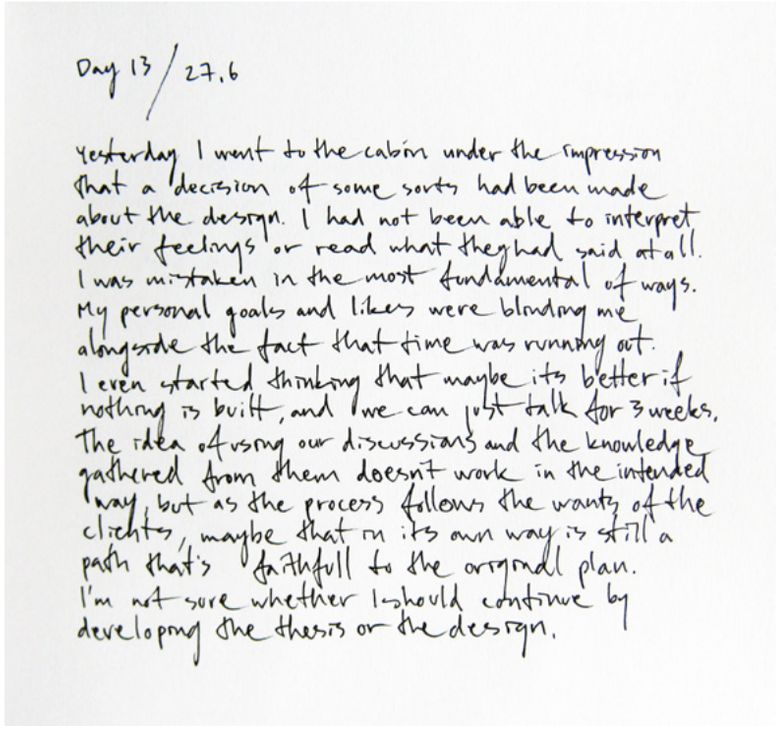
The process comprised of people, words, thoughts and about ninety metres of yellow rope. These together gave the project its direction and its result. Using design probes benefited the knowledge gathering as well as analysing the project as a whole.

The participants of the test project, be they called *the users, the clients, the test subjects* or just Mike and Martha, wish to remain relatively incognito. I hope they wont protest for describing them as a well educated, middle class couple in their sixties. Neither one of them is originally from the area where test site is located, but both have history there. Their crash test dummylike patience was a prerequisite for making any of this possible.

## Analysis

The poetic knowledge gathering process can only be done by documenting the interactions between the users and the designer. This results in a large amount of material, which can also be used in analysing the project as a whole. When looking into what actually happened during the test project, I mainly analysed material from two sources: the video discussions and my personal project diary. The homework assignments served their purpose during the test as they melted into the discussions. These together give a reasonably accurate account of events in relation to the three week time frame and make it possible to determine what in the discussions led to certain events and decisions and how I saw those occurences at the time. Analysing the project means analysing myself also.

The first step of the analysis was to make sense of the eight hours of discussion. I had gone through all the videos during the test project, but now I did it for a different reason. I was not looking for inspration for a design anymore. I was looking to see how it all played out. What led to the achieved result? It would be easier to talk eight hours straight than it is to watch eight hours of talking. To track the sequence of events I watched the videos and made a time-lapse animation of all the keywords and thoughts that emerged from the discussions (see appendix). The animation is a combination of key words and symbols which represent different events during the test and the feelings I experienced when watching the videos. Suprisingly, as I compared the feelings I had written down in my project diary to those which arose from watching the discussions again, there was no clear difference.


Day 13 / 27.6

Yesterday I went to the cabin under the impression that a decision of some sorts had been made about the design. I had not been able to interpret their feelings or read what they had said at all. I was mistaken in the most fundamental of ways. My personal goals and likes were blinding me alongside the fact that time was running out. I even started thinking that maybe its better if nothing is built, and we can just talk for 3 weeks. The idea of using our discussions and the knowledge gathered from them doesn't work in the intended way, but as the process follows the wants of the clients, maybe that on its own way is still a path that's faithfull to the original plan. I'm not sure whether I should continue by developing the thesis or the design.



The same things which affected me back then still affected me later. With hindsight I was able to reason how the test could have been done better on my part, but the emotions were still the same.

The animation speedes up the process and squeezes the three weeks into one minute. Obviously, this is not an accurate scientific method, but it shows the way different things were emphasized and at what point of the process. It was interesting to see how easy it is to disregard valuable bits of knowledge, words and sentences which later on turn out to be crucial points in the development of the process. The videos show the exact moment when something was said. The animation shows a simplified timeline of subjects brought into the discussion.

Two clear tipping points can be seen by going through the animation. The first one takes place on day 11, when a fixed decision about a design is made. This is followed by making mockups and by researching materials. The second one takes place on day 13, when the question of a budget is introduced in the planning of the decided design. It is clear that due to the haste in coming up with and completing the design, there was not enough time to reflect. Not for the users, nor the designer. I felt pressure to come up with something in time for it to be built. Time ran out, which was a question of planning the process incorrectly.

The animation shows with cruel clarity how fast I as the designer got fixated on a certain design idea and thought that the users were on board. It did not feel too fast at all at the time. This of course brings us to the fact that all design is about communication, which can be difficult especially between different cultures. Attempting to understand the deep sentiments of another person's soul in regards to something as vague as atmosphere, can easily turn into kitchen psychology of the worst kind. It can get too deep and unhumorous even when the participants understand each other. In this mess the simplest of things can go unnoticed or unsaid.

The second tipping point is found when money got involved in the discussion. Money should have been the first subject on the planning list.

*People speak far too much evil of money.*
*Sometimes it is the only thing that puts clear restrictions on people's intentions.*
(Hotakainen 2009, my translation)

Actually money itself was not the issue. It worked as an catalyst for a new discussion about the motivation of the participants - about the reasons why this project was undertaken in the first place. This, in turn, lead to the realisation that perhaps it is not wise for the users to invest in building something at that moment. The discussions show clearly that after this question had emerged there was no turning back, which indicates that the doubt was there all along. Perhaps hidden, perhaps unnoticed by me. The process brought up in concrete terms the fact that there was no urgent need for anything new. The last week of the project was spent discussing and coming to terms with this fact. For me that meant moving on to the next phase of making the thesis: I needed to find out what had happened? It all seems clear now, but it was not clear at the time.

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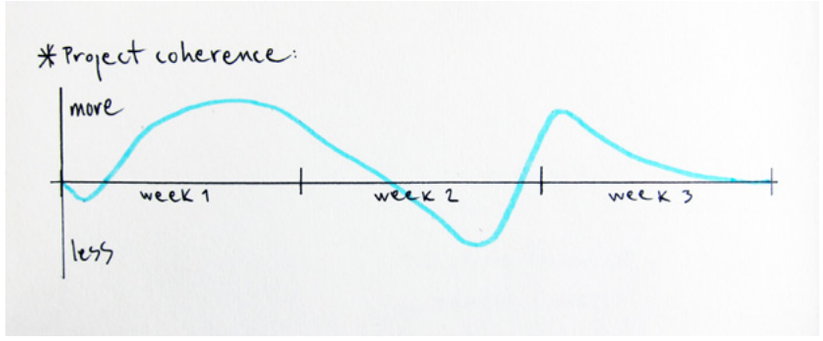


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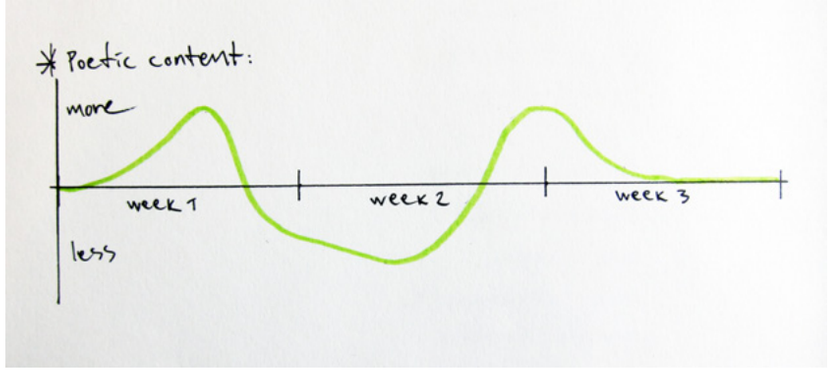


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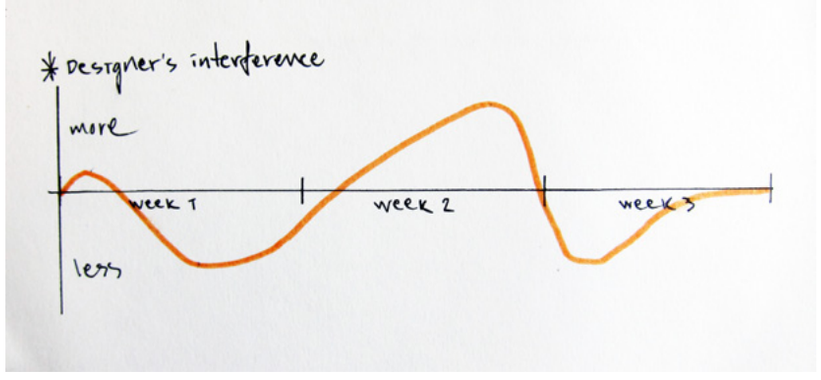



The diagrams are intentionally inexact, as emotions are not scientifically quantifiable.



The right questions and answers may not be verbalised during the period of gathering knowledge, but they emerge through the process in other forms. A turning point for the whole process may go unnoticed at the moment it is voiced out or felt. Its signifigance can only be seen when the complete material is analysed as a whole, which means that there should be a period of reflection before introducing sketches and another one after going through the sketches.

The test project was designed wrongly in the sense that its tight schedule did not allow for this kind of reflection to take place. What happened was that the process took on a life of its own and, instead of the designer, it started to lead the way, and that change gave the project its honest result.

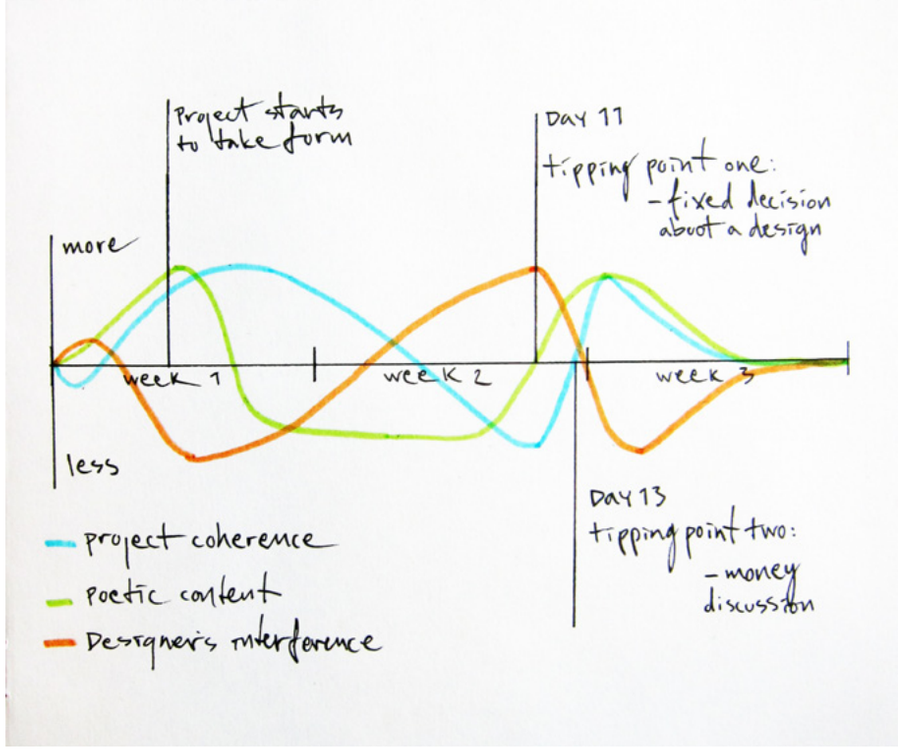
Afterwards it is easy to see meaningful content in the early stage discussions and homework assignments. Building mockups and testing them, played an important role in making the decision not to invest in realising them. This is also clear now when looking back on the project. During the process, however, it can be difficult to see value in something that seems like a negative development.

From the videos and my project diary I made rough measurements of three different attributes of the process:

1. Project coherence: I tried to see how well the project was on track as a whole during the three weeks.
2. Poetic content: I picked moments from the discussions, which in hindsight had meaning for the outcome of the project.
3. Designer's interference: I evaluated my level of creative input as a designer.

I sketched diagrams of each attribute on a timeline of the three weeks. In the diagrams time is represented on a horisontal level and and the amounts of the different attributes are curves moving from left to right with time. When the curves are placed on top of each other the results are less than suprising: the less I was involved with creative input as a designer, the more meaningful poetic content was gathered, and the more coherent the project was (see next page). The test project itself was smarter than the designer. The diagrams also tell of the fact that most of the meaningful poetic content was gathered in the early stages of the process. After this my interference as a designer uprooted the buds of ideas that were forming with the help of the design probes. At the time this was difficult to see. One single feeling turned into a single word can alter the course of the whole project. This also means that the substance of this design method, the affect it potentially has on the design can be one single meaninful thing. The method does not have to change everything.

Since no decision had been made of what to design when the project started, the early successful stages of the knowledge gathering can be seen as efficient concept search. The second point where the project was coherent and meaningful was when money came up and I took a step back. Even though this development was perhaps not the most poetic one, it was the most practical one of the whole project.




The process started with some confusion, but soon found its form and soon lost it again. In the beginning I was involved only as a facilitator of the knowledge gathering. As I started taking the role of a designer, the process changed and lost its coherence and poetic content. These were regained towards the end when reality hit and money got involved.



**Improved Version**

The test was a prototype of an empathic spatial design project. It had many faults, but also value. It is not suitable for every occasion. I collected what I learned from it to a new and improved version. Here is what I would keep in mind the next time around. Because this is already closer to reality, I use the word *client* instead of *user*.

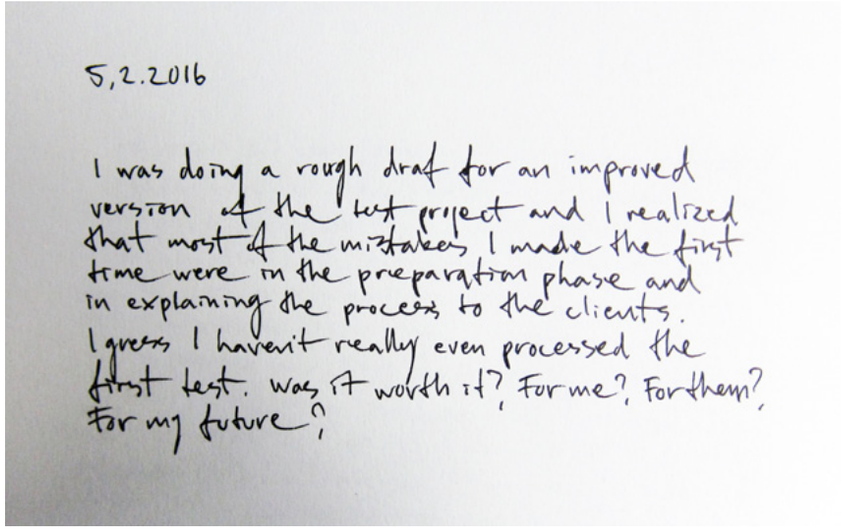
Like in any project planning is crucial. Making the right preparations can affect the outcome as I learned. It is the responsibility of the designer to make sure that the clients understand what they are getting into. The concept of the process needs to be explained in practical terms, since this is not a simple deal where the client simply commissions a design and receives it when it is ready. It also needs to be clear what is expected of the client. The level of involvement that is required must be defined in terms of hours. Also the scope of emotional involvement has to be explained. This way everyone knows how and how much they can take part in the process.

Even though it is quite difficult to explain the specialities and the benefits of this kind of process, it would be important for the client to understand them. This would create an environment of trust between the participants and common trust in the uniqueness of the method. It is easier to sacrifice time and energy for something that seems worthwhile. When the client understands that the outcome will be different and more personal and that the process includes possibilities for the client to take part in the creative process, the sacrifices can be justified.

After all this is clear the participants can make the decisions about whether or not this kind of process would be the right one for the situation. Whether the clients want to invest their time, money and emotions to this degree. The designer can also assess if this kind of process would be beneficial. A joint decision should be made about the necessity of going through all the trouble, if an easier and cheaper way is found.

Designing this way is expensive for the client, since it involves a lot more time spent in the concept phase than usually. The seemingly open-ended process of poetic knowledge gathering needs practical limitations. The task of the designer is to create a framework that manages these limitations and divides the project into separate phases. Allocating a set amount of money from the budget for the knowledge gathering phase of the project would give clear limits to how much time can be spent on chatting about the weather and childhood memories. A separate timetable for the knowledge gathering phase of the project could be made to include information about what the participants need to do, when they do it and how much it all will cost. This way the client would be able to imagine tangible results for the use of discussions, homework assignments or other design probes.

Documenting everything is vital. Even things which do not seem important at the time, like early preparations. There is no way of knowing which hint of information, which comment or moment of silence turns out to be meaningful as the process advances.






When the project starts, the knowledge gathering phase is the first one. The story of the design begins with the story of the client. The direction should be from the large scale of the surrounding atmosphere and emotions to the smaller scale details. This means discussions on a general level without restrictions, which lead to the place, its history, meaning and function for the client. Homework assignments are good because the client can concentrate on them without the designer's interference. Going through the assignments together adds to their value.

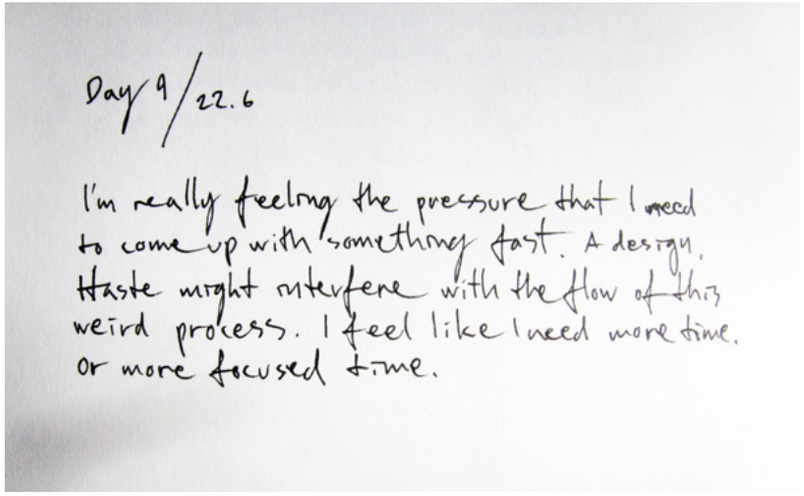
The knowledge gathering phase should be separated from the design phase. All the material gathered should be analysed as a whole before any sketches or design proposals are made, because it is very difficult to see what in the complex process leads to certain events. One sentence in the first discussion can have a large impact on the process. It can be a tipping point, which affects everything, but goes unnoticed at the time. Meanwhile, some things may be repeated over and over again without any significance. If sketches are introduced during the knowledge gathering they may lead the process in a wrong direction as happened in North Carolina.

Once the material has been analysed together with the client, hopefully something valuable has emerged. This can be the inspiration for early stage sketches, design ideas and suggestions. It will start a smooth transition from the knowledge gathering phase to the creative phase. Once ideas are presented they should be viewed against the backdrop of the first phase. Do these ideas still feel right considering the large scale, the atmosphere? This kind of reflection needs to be done during every stage of the project: when building mockups, testing materials, making visualizations and so on. Depending on the situation and its possibilities every part of the design could have a connection or reference to the atmosphere experienced by the client. This means that the client is involved in every stage of the project.

When the final decision is made on the direction of the project, in other words, when it is known what the design should be, a division of responsabilities should take place. To this point the client has had a central role in the process, but at some point the designer needs to take the lead. This decision should be clear to all. This does not mean that the client's input is no longer needed. After all, the client is the only one who the designer can turn to when in need of atmospheric advice. If possible, reflection with the client could be done even during the building of the design. If nothing else, it might offer valuable information about the process for future benefit.

# Conclusions

-Practical possibilities
-Challenges
-Personal journey






## Practical Possibilities

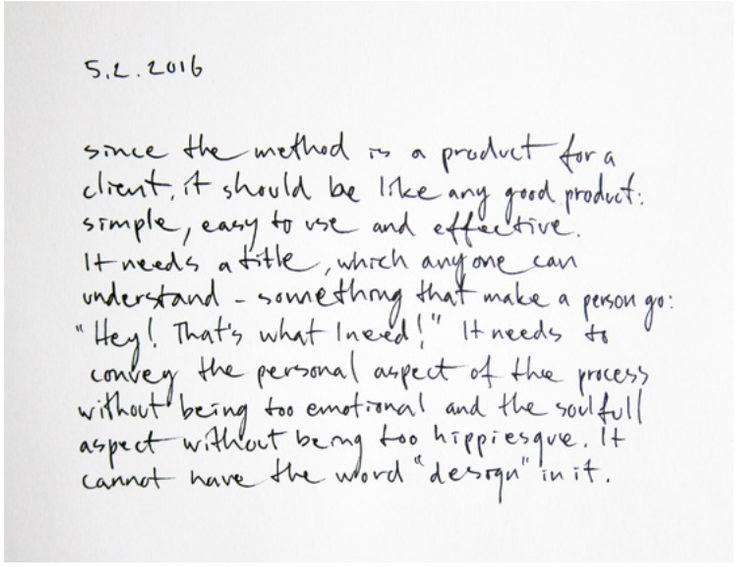
The outcome of this research shows that the designer's role in an empathic spatial design project like the one that was tested is a balancing act between being a designer and a facilitator. During the test project I often felt confused about my role. I did not know when exactly to switch from managing the knowledge gathering to giving creative input. I moved too fast. The test indicates that the best results for gathering poetic knowledge were made when the designer took a step back and provided a simple framework for workshopping and the use of design probes. I should have simply been in control of that framework and thus provided the users with a possibility to experience and communicate their atmospheres in peace.

The most meaningful poetic knowledge was gathered in the beginning of the process. This supports the view of Koskinen and Battarbee that the most efficient place for empathy would be in the early conceptual part of the product development process, when the needs of the user have not been clearly defined yet. (Koskinen & Battarbee 2003, 49.) As for the use of empathy in the later stages of a design project, the test found no answers to, since it never reached those stages.

The most important thing lacking in the test project was time for reflection. A period of time for analysing the gathered material should be included in the project's timetable. All of this material should be analysed as a whole before the project advances from gathering poetic knowledge to creating design ideas. This does not have to seek a drastic change from the initial idea or dream of the design. Its power can be found in a single moment, which ends up affecting perhaps only one single thing in the design. That thing in turn can make a world of difference to the user.

A spatial designer could use the method of the test project as a tool in projects, which allow for large amounts of time spent in the concept phases. Knowledge gathering and analysis are common operations for designers anyway. The biggest difference between this method of designing and traditional workshopping is the intensity and the length of the interaction: the emotions involved and the money involved.

Other practical applications for this could be found in situations where the atmosphere of a certain place needs to be translated from one group of people to another, which do not necessarily understand or have the time for understanding the same kinf of terminology. The spatial designer could act as a translator who turns the experience of the user into a language understood by, for example, an architect, city planner, comissioner of the project, or the user itself. A spatial designer could work as a kind of a consultant of atmosphere to protect the user's intuitive experience. Turning vague descriptions of feelings and perceptions into clear arguments would give credibility to poetic knowledge in the eyes of decision makers. Design projects often include work of specialists such as engineers and constructors. One of these could be a translator of atmosphere.






## Challenges

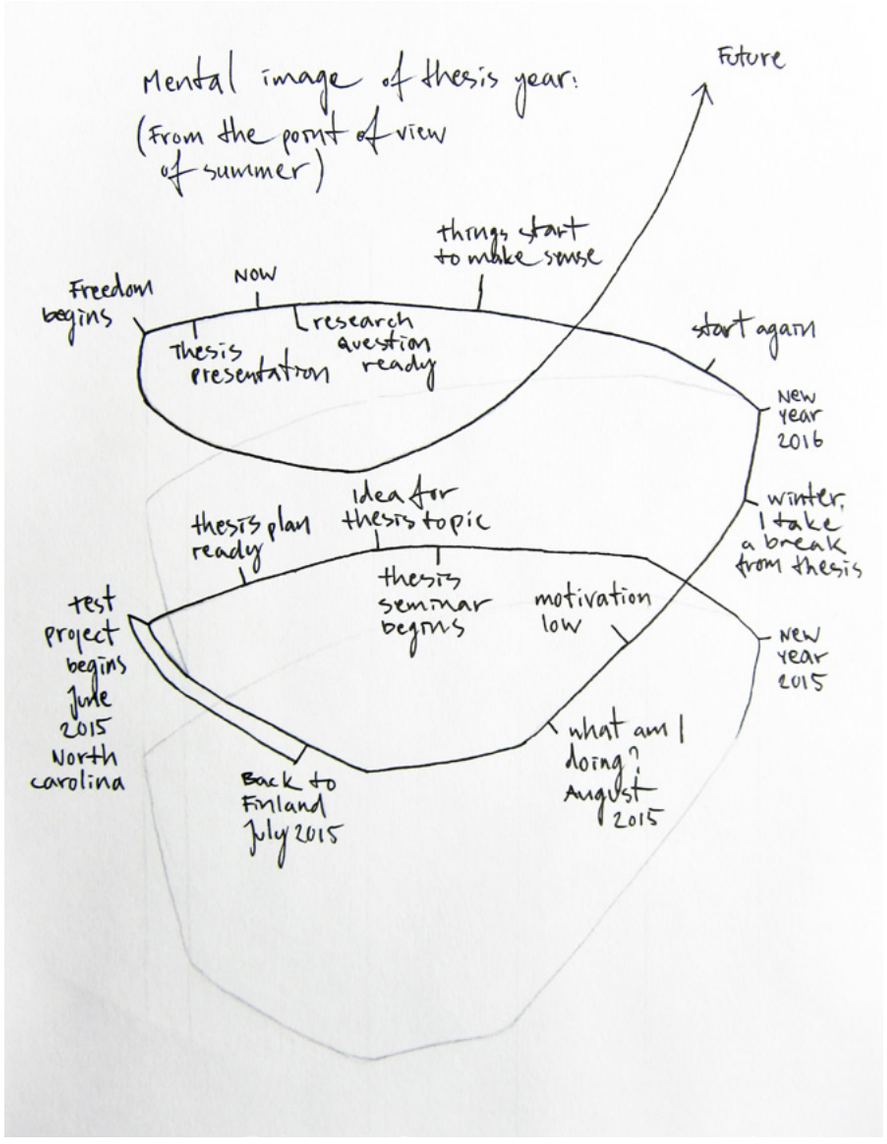
The frailty of the poetic image is reflected in the frailty of the process of making sense of that image. It is easy for the designer to unwittingly interfere in the user's experience of atmosphere and start directing the creative process away from that experience. This sensitivity of the knowledge gathering process calls for rigidity in the framework which houses it. It must follow a strict timetable and a budget in order to be practical.

It is also of vital importance that the user understands the reasons and benefits of this kind of method of designing. The preparation of the project requires contact between the user and the designer, and this is the responsability of the designer. Documenting everything possible is of equal importance, since it is not known what exactly is sought after. This should also start from the very beginning.

Another big issue is money. A method like this requires hours and hours of work by the designer. Immersion into another person's world and the *spirit of place* takes time. It also requires time and commitment from the user. Not every one has the time, energy or the will to accept a stranger into their world. It is probable that in order to reach the required level of concentration and trust, the knowledge gathering needs to be done as a single intervention instead of spreading the discussions and other interactions over a long period of time. This means that the user has to be able to make time possibly for several days or weeks. Even if the time and the funds for a longer contract with the designer were available, the user might not want to expose his or her soul in this way. The process relies on the openness of the user and designer's ability to sensitise the user to the subject of atmosphere. This kind of method can work as a tool for the designer, but only if the project meets these requirements.

Whether or not it would be seen as an economically viable choice depends on the ability of the designer to make the user see its value. This could be very difficult to do especially in times of economic uncertainty. For instance, if I were to sell this idea to a new client now, it would be hard to explain how a vague, expensive and emotionally strenuous method would be the one to be chosen. Especially since testing the prototype of the method resulted in something very much immaterial. It would take many tests of different versions of the the method to make it a functioning tool. These tests would have to result in a track record of succesful projects and satisfied clients before the appeal of the method would overweigh its costs in the decision making.

Perhaps the answer to this would be to use parts of the method in situations where it is sensible practically and economically. The knowledge gathering does not have to take three weeks when it is planned and prepared correctly. Conducting mini versions of the test project would accumulate experience for the designer and develop the method into a functional tool, which could be seen as a product itself. After going through the test project, for me personally it is difficult to imagine another project where I would not take into account the user's experience of atmosphere.






## Personal Journey

I started working on this thesis with little knowledge of how complex a subject I was dealing with. A three-week test turned into one year's worth of learning. The value of this is without a doubt mostly personal. Even though I used approved methods of practice-led research to the best of my capabilities, it is evident that the scientific contribution of this thesis is at the level of what can be expected of a student project. The real value was in the lessons that I had to go through, which is logical and almost festive - I went to school to learn and I did. I learned that it is not so serious.

It is interesting to imagine how this research was affected by the fact that it did not go as planned. Did it become better and more valuable for this? They say that the worst musician in the band learns the most.

At some points during the year I felt that it was pointless to make an autoethnographical account of a failure. As I mentioned before it was difficult to see value in the project because it did not result in anything material and visual. Even though I was supposed to understand that my topic, atmosphere, does not rely on the eyes, but on the human being as a whole, I felt that the test project must create something that can be presented as a visual image. And that image can then be celebrated as the result of an artistic master's thesis. Luckily I was wrong. With help from the wiser I came to understand that the essence of this thesis was its honesty.

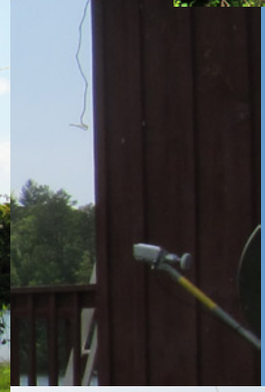
To the research question of this thesis I would give the answer: maybe. In some situations it can be possible to communicate the experience of atmosphere and use it as inspiration in a spatial design process. And it is worth the attempt.

# Appendix

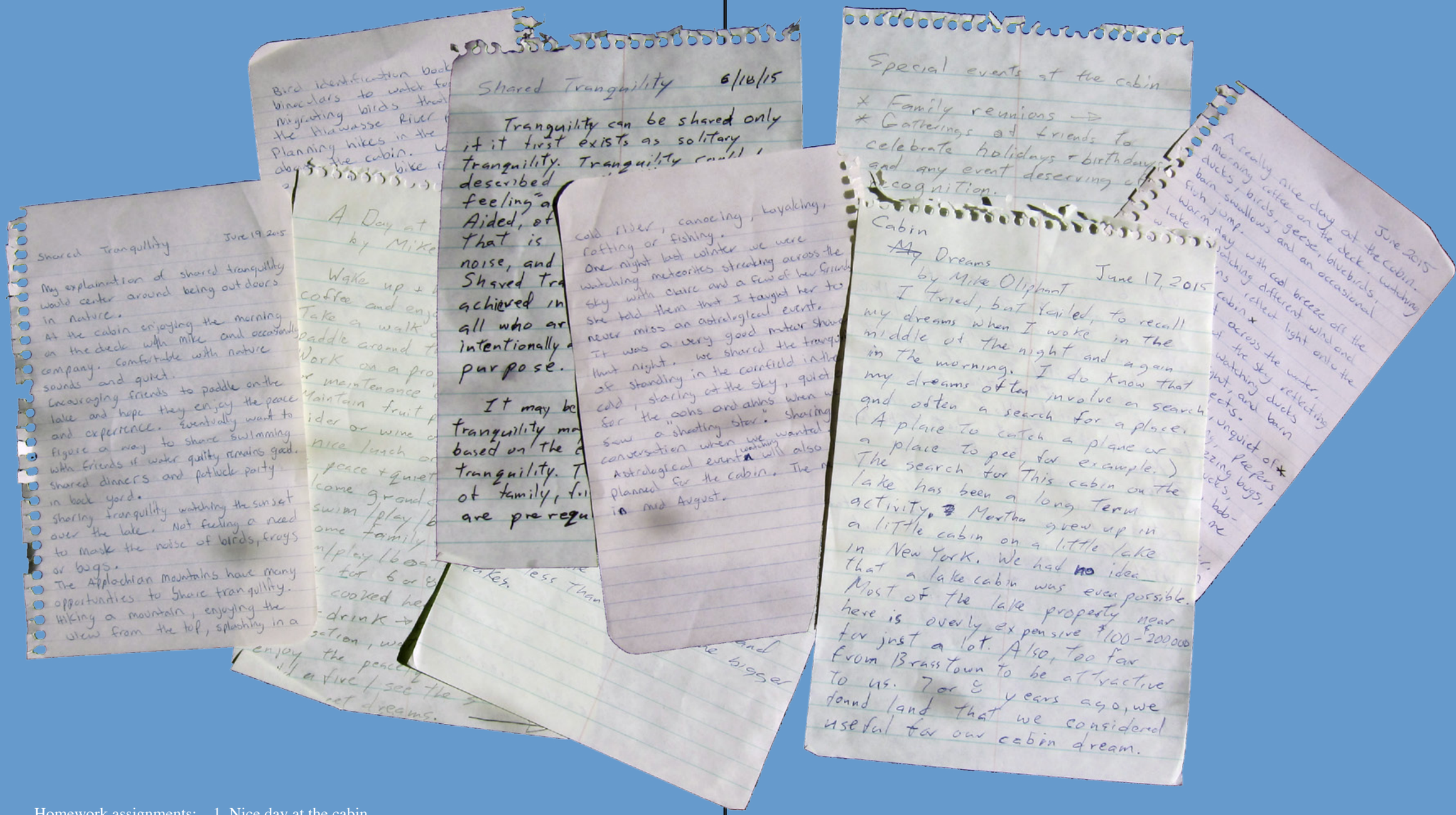
-Map and collage of test project site
-Home work assignments
-Video discussion captures
-Timelapse animation of video analysis
-Two examples of empathy

Satellite map image of the test project area.
Google Maps 2016

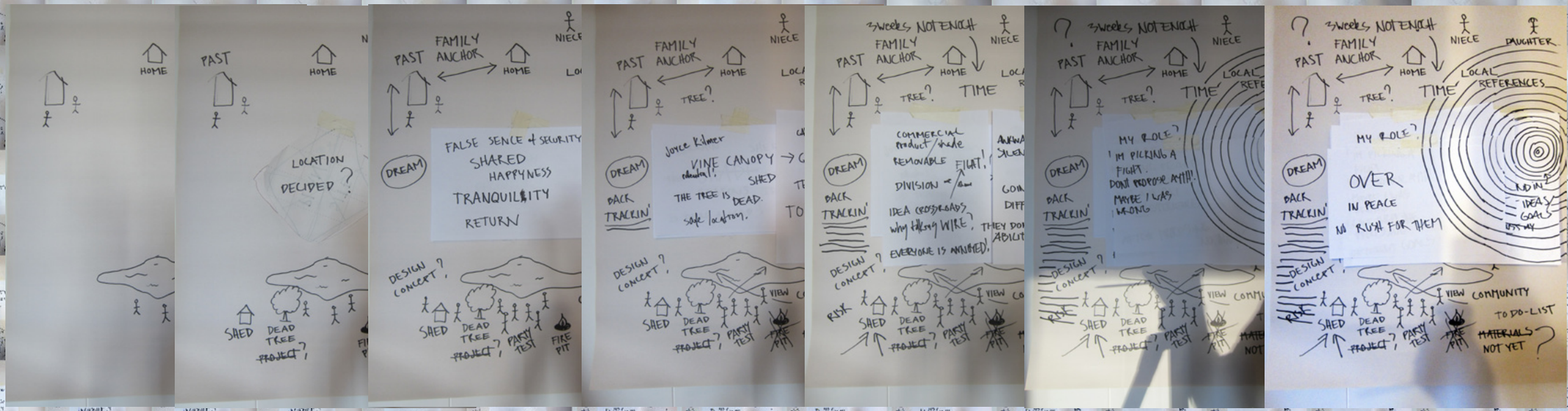
Atmosphere collage* of the test project site.



* inspired by *Wilson meets Wirkkala*, Tuula Isohanni 2012


Shared Tranquility June 19 2015
My explaination of shared tranquility would center around being out doors in nature.
At the cabin enjoying the morning on the deck with Mike and occasionally company. Comfortable with nature sounds and quiet.
Encouraging friends to paddle on the lake and hope they enjoy the peace and experience. Eventually want to figure a way to share swimming with friends if water quality remains good.
Shared dinners and potluck party in back yard.
Sharing tranquility watching the sunset over the lake. Not feeling a need to mask the noise of birds, frogs or bugs.
The Applachian mountains have many opportunities to share tranquility. Hiking a mountain, enjoying the view from the top, splashing in a
Shared Tranquility 6/16/15
Tranquility can be shared only if it first exists as solitary tranquility. Tranquility
described
feeling"
Aided, of
That is
noise, and
Shared tra
achieved in
all who ar
intentionally
purpose.
It may be
tranquility ma
based on the
tranquility. T
of family, fr
are prerequ
cold river, canoeing, kayaking, rafting or fishing.
One night last winter we were watching meteorites streaking across the sky with Claire and a few of her friends. She told them that I taught her to never miss an astrological event. It was a very good meteor shower that night. We shared the tranquility of standing in the cornfield in the cold, staring at the sky, quiet for the "ooh's and ahh's when we saw a "shooting star." Sharing conversation when we weren't watching Astrological events will also be planned for the cabin. The next in mid August.
Special events at the cabin
* Family reunions →
* Gatherings of friends to celebrate holidays + birthdays and any event deserving of recognition.
Cabin
My Dreams June 17, 2015
by Mike Oliphant
I tried, but failed, to recall my dreams when I woke in the middle of the night and again in the morning. I do know that my dreams often involve a search and often a search for a place. (A place to catch a plane or a place to pee for example.) The search for this cabin on the lake has been a long term activity. Martha grew up in a little cabin on a little lake in New York. We had no idea that a lake cabin was even possible. Most of the lake property near here is overly expensive $100-200,000 for just a lot. Also, too far from Brasstown to be attractive to us. 7 or 8 years ago, we found land that we considered useful for our cabin dream.
June 2015
A really nice day at the cabin. Morning coffee on the deck, watching ducks, birds, geese, bluebirds, barn swallows and an occasional fish jump.
Warm day with cool breeze off the lake
Watching different wind and warm reflect light onto the cabin + across the water, at the sky reflecting watching ducks and barn
unquiet of + Peepers
Homework assignments: 1. Nice day at the cabin
2. Whatever comes to mind of shared tranquillity
3. Dream about the cabin


Frames from the video discussions.




7 of the 184 frames from the time-lapse animation.

The circles on the right represent each time while watching the discussion videos I said to myself: “This is bullshit.”

The horizontal lines on the left mark each occasion when there was backtracking in the discussions.

The rest are thoughts and symbols for other events in the discussions.

*Isopleth*
Wim Goossens & Arnaud Hendrickx, 2014)
(f.l.t.r.) the physical measuring, the informed shape, the measured site of Isopleth
(Pictures: Berlemont et al. 2014, 9)

*Stability*
Alex Schweder & Ward Shelley 2009
Various construction materials, household appliances, 2 people, 4’-0” x 24’-0” x 12’-0”, 1 week
(Pictures: www.alexschweder.com)

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*I have not seen wind, I have seen the clouds move.*
*I have not seen time, I have seen the leaves fall.*

-Eduardo Chillida